

"It was only when things became even more difficult, and more complicated for me that I decided to go," said Novembre, 45.

Still, the decision was tough — until the day in September when three of their five children were sent home from school because of unpaid school fees.

"We wouldn't like to leave our country and go live with foreigners, but the situation of the country leaves you no other choice," he said.

Viviane Novembre, 41, said the move was a necessary sacrifice to save her children. "The country is plunging down a black hole," she said. "As a parent, you have to do everything you can so that your children aren't brought up in the same deplorable state as you."

They contacted a relative in Chile who agreed to buy the \$1,000 ticket.

His wife said she hoped Novembre "finds something to do and sends me something so that I can take care of the children."

He still hasn't. After moving four hours south to the smaller city of Chillán, he occasionally finds work picking strawberries on a farm for \$10 a day — not even half of the \$23-a-day minimum wage.

He finds the work physically grueling and the town difficult to adapt to. He struggles with homesickness and the chilly weather.

"The only reason you don't hear me say I am headed back to Haiti next month is because I don't have a penny in my hands," Novembre said, his voice heavy with disappointment.

"You might have been a doctor, engineer, director of a school in Haiti," he said. "But everyone here is equal and with the same chance ... everyone has to trace the same route. If it wasn't for the possibility of getting permission to work, there would be no reason to hope." Life in Chile

But getting that permission isn't easy. To work in Chile, migrants need a temporary work visa, which comes with a Chilean ID number, the first step toward permanent residency. And to get a visa, they need a job offer with a contract. Yet most employers require an ID number before offering a job contract.

It's a Catch-22 that makes undocumented Haitians vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

The immigration rules don't work, said Sandoval, Bachelet's former immigration chief. The only way a migrant can legally enter Chile is as a tourist — with hotel reservations, pocket money and a return ticket. So migrants say they're tourists. The law, Sandoval said, "promotes lying."

And worse, he said, the system has "turned hostile, making the conditions immigrants find themselves in when they get to Chile even more precarious."

Dieucilien Casseus has spent two years trying to legalize his work documents after a false contract landed him in trouble with Chilean authorities.

The 44-year-old former teaching administrator from Gonaïves said he didn't know his contract was fake until the immigration office turned down his work visa application. He'd paid someone to help him get a contract when he arrived in Chile and thought the agreement was legal.

Chile has been good to him, though. In August, he found steady employment as a machine technician at a textile factory, and his bosses have accompanied him to the immigration office to help him complete his resubmitted paperwork to legalize his status.

Pulling out a folder, he shows his copy of his visa application along with his Haiti training certificate and teaching degree, which isn't recognized in Chile. He also had to leave his wife and daughters behind.

"Imagine having four children and no job," said Casseus, who sold land to pay for his ticket and borrowed the rest. "I had no choice but to take the chance."

Chile wasn't his first choice. He had hoped to go to the U.S. But the Department of Homeland Security resumed deportations to Haiti in 2016 and the Trump administration in November ended Temporary Protected Status for Haitians, a humanitarian program that shielded nearly 60,000 from deportation. He's mostly given up hope of getting to the U.S. for now.

"There was a time when there was anecdotal data showing that Haitians were coming to Chile to get to the United States," said Doña-Reveco, the Chilean migration expert. "But when the U.S. restricted Haitians' entrance last year, that migration can no longer go to the U.S. So it's staying in Chile."

Casseus' \$747 monthly salary, before taxes, is more than the \$540 budget he had for the entire staff at the school in Haiti — 19 teachers plus support workers. But it comes at a steep price: He works 60 hours a week, leaving little time for social activities or Spanish classes, a necessity for a better job.

And he doesn't make enough to support both households, even though his living quarters in Chile are so tiny that the room barely fits two twin beds with a small stove and refrigerator. He pays \$260 a month, but he must share a bathroom with 15 other residents.

Still, he says, he scrapes together money each month to send to Haiti.

He recently took in the relative of a neighbor, allowing Jamsley Charles, 24, to sleep on the other bed for free, remembering how a stranger did the same for him. Twenty-two days after arriving from Haiti, Charles was still trying to find work.

Casseus said it pains him to see "the generation who is supposed to participate in the development of the country [of Haiti] being chased out by misery." Missing Haiti

Kesnel Clerge doesn't know yet whether Chile will be home for him in the long term, but for now, he's enjoying what he didn't have in Haiti: financial security.

"If any of my children get sick right now, I am not worried about not having the money for the doctor," he said.

Shortly after arriving last year, Clerge, 32, walked into a local grocery store, took a photo and posted it on Facebook as a commentary on the promising new life he had found — and the dead-end one he'd left behind.

"The message I was sending was just how I was in a market in Chile, I would like to be in a market like that in Haiti. But in my country, you can't," he said, explaining that street violence and fears for personal safety can infect even the most routine interactions in Haiti. "Just as I am comfortable here, I would like to be comfortable in my country."

In Chile, he works six days a week at a furniture factory in Casablanca, an hour drive northwest of Santiago. He makes around \$800 a month — a vast sum compared to the \$78 a month he earned in Cap-Haïtien in a tourism job tending to vacationing tourists. The salary couldn't even cover school fees for his three children.

"I spent nine years working and if I had a sick child, I couldn't even afford to send them to the hospital. ... I was in a bad situation," he said, sitting in his tiny room that is just large enough for a twin bed, a small dresser and his carry-on suitcase.

To fund his Chilean dream, Clerge borrowed money from a friend, and raised the \$3,500 he paid a middleman to arrange the trip by selling a few goats and a cow.

"I sold them with tears in my eyes," Clerge said, "imagining if I ended up not succeeding, I would be forced to return home with nothing."

After six months in Chile, starting with a job picking limes and oranges, Clerge got his one-year worker's visa. He's already working on applying for his five-year visa.

But the pull back to Haiti is strong. Every day, his wife calls asking when he's coming back. He misses his 1-year-old son, who was just starting to sit up when he left. "If I enter Haiti, he won't even recognize me," Clerge said, choking back the tears. "This life is very unfair."

Most of the Haitian newcomers are rootless, ready to move on if they see a better opportunity. They don't want to build dream homes here or start businesses. Instead, they harbor dreams of going somewhere else, the U.S., Canada, even back to Haiti.

Stanley Mentor, 27, was in his fourth year of agronomy studies at the private Université Polyvalente d'Haïti in Port-au-Prince in 2015 when he called a family meeting and told them, "The way I see the country, there is no hope for the youth."

With the financial support of his grandfather, who lives in Boston, Mentor headed to Chile in August 2016.

He was conned a couple of times at the beginning, when a short taxi ride cost \$300, and when he paid \$250 for what turned out to be a fake work contract. A \$50-a-day construction job ended after six months when the boss became nervous about his lack of papers.

But eventually he landed a job doing maintenance work with a real contract. With that in hand, he's been able to apply for a work visa.

"Life for me is 10,000 times better in Chile than in Haiti," said Mentor, who pays \$500 a month for a three-bedroom apartment with water, electricity and internet access. "It's been a year-and-a-half since I've been on my own and not had to rely on family."

"Before I used to have to call an aunt or an uncle in the U.S., and say, 'I have a problem here. I need \$100 to pay for transportation to go to school,'" said Mentor, who speaks some Spanish.

"The life I have now, I wouldn't have had it in Haiti. I wouldn't have been able to rent an apartment on my own," Mentor said. "How would I have been able to do that in Haiti?"

He hopes to return to Haiti — but it will take more than longing for him to pack his suitcase.

"I am waiting on a change," he said. "I am waiting on development."

As he watches the flood of young Haitians who continue to arrive in search of a better life, he sees decades of bad governance and empty promises — a democracy that has offered only disillusionment.

"If all the past governments had put structures in place, I wouldn't have been here today. And neither would a lot of other youths — the engineers, agronomists, doctors — who are in Chile, suffering," Mentor said. "When all of these youth leave Haiti, who is going to be left to take over?"

This project was made possible by a fellowship from the French-American Foundation – United States. The story does not reflect the views of the French-American Foundation or its directors, employees or representatives.

Refugee Finds A New, Tiny Home In Paris Garden

By Umberto Bacchi

Reuters, March 1, 2018

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TERRORISM INVESTIGATIONS

Trial Begins For Widow Of Orlando Nightclub Gunman

By Joey Roulette

Reuters, March 1, 2018

Full-text stories from Reuters currently cannot be included in this document. You may, however, click the link above to access the story.

Jury Selection Begins In Trial Against Gunman's Widow

By Amy Green

NPR, March 1, 2018

Jury selection begins Thursday in the trial of Noor Salman, the widow of the Pulse nightclub shooter.

Salman's husband, Omar Mateen, killed 49 people and injured dozens more in a mass shooting on Latin night at the gay club in Orlando, Fla., in 2016. Mateen declared support for ISIS before he was killed in a shootout with law enforcement, ending his three-hour rampage.

Salman faces charges of aiding and abetting terrorism and obstruction of justice.

According to Karen Greenberg, the director of the Center on National Security at Fordham University Law School, one of the biggest challenges facing the jurors will be separating the shooter's actions from Salman's.

"You really want to address the tremendous tragedy and injustice that was visited upon Orlando's people by this crime," Greenberg says. "To have somebody in custody who is a proxy defendant is something you definitely want to avoid."

The federal judge presiding over the case denied a change of venue request, so the trial will take place in a courthouse just 2 miles from Pulse. In another setback for the defense, the judge also ruled last week that Salman's statement to FBI agents just hours after the attack will be admissible at trial.

"I am sorry for what happened. I wish I'd go back and tell his family and the police what he was going to do," she wrote.

Salman told the agents that she knew about her husband's plans and that when he left the house that day, she understood he was on his way to Pulse.

Her attorneys say that Salman was not given proper Miranda warnings before she made the statement and that she was not aware of her husband's plans for the shooting. Salman has denied any involvement in the massacre.

Charles Rose, a trial advocacy expert at Stetson University, says prosecutors will have to lay out her involvement in her husband's radicalization: "How it happened, when it happened, whether the wife knew or must have known about it."

Rose expects prosecutors to argue that Salman "assisted him in accomplishing his goals as a radicalized terrorist."

Salman has said she is a victim of domestic violence. Rose says the defense may argue the abuse left her with few choices.

"It's not that she intended to participate with him," Rose says. "It's that she was forced to be present when he was planning the activity because of the abusive nature of their relationship, that if she hadn't chosen to be present that she would have suffered such abuse that she had to make a survival choice."

But Mia Bloom, a terrorism expert at Georgia State University, says that argument doesn't absolve Salman of responsibility to stop further violence.

"There is no amount of trauma that can prevent you from picking up the phone when the person is not in the same room and they're not in the same city and they're en route and alerting the police," she says. "Lives could have been saved."

Greenberg says that if Salman is convicted, the case will send an important message.

"If you think somebody is about to be involved in a terrorist attack or any kind of mass murder and they have guns and they've said things that are worrisome, you need to step away from that or report it."

Mental health providers and translators will be at the courthouse to support family members and survivors watching a video feed of the proceedings in a private courtroom.

Laly Santiago-Leon will be one of those watching. Her cousin Luis Daniel Wilson-Leon was killed in the shooting. Everyone called him Dani.

"I just miss him so much," she says. "We just confided in one another about everything."

Santiago-Leon has asked for the opportunity to testify or submit an open letter to the court. She says she wants to look the defendant in the eye and try to explain what she lost.

The trial is expected to last several weeks. If convicted, Noor Salman could face life in prison.

Trial Begins For Omar Mateen's Widow Over Role In Pulse Nightclub Shooting As Heartbroken Families Seek Answers

By Terence Cullen, New York Daily News

New York Daily News, March 1, 2018

Jury selection began Thursday in the long-awaited trial of the Pulse nightclub shooter's widow, marking an emotional day for survivors and the loved ones of the 49 people killed.

Grieving mom Christine Leinonen, 60, was at the federal courthouse in Orlando in person, saying she wants answers about the June 2016 massacre and exactly what Noor Salman knew about her husband Omar Mateen's grisly plans and when.

Salman, 31, was not with Mateen during the horrific mass shooting, but she's charged with aiding and abetting as well as obstructing justice.

Mateen, 29, was killed by police hours after he opened fire inside the Orlando club with a Sig Sauer MCX, a semi-automatic firearm police initially called an "AR-15-type assault rifle."

"At the beginning, the tears wouldn't stop. Going into that ominous courtroom, it was like a funeral. The whole ominous nature of a courtroom is so big and real," Leinonen told the Daily News after she attended the morning session with more than a dozen survivors, victims' relatives and supporters.

"I hadn't seen (Salman) come in, and then I saw her. I thought 'Oh my God, that's her,'" said Leinonen, who lost son Christopher (Drew) Leinonen, 32. "It just brought me back. She could have stopped it. How dare she. She's a mother, but she didn't care. She could have prevented it if she had any empathy toward the people who were going to be killed or shot."

A former Michigan state trooper now living near Tampa, Leinonen said she plans to attend as much of the trial as possible.

"The FBI hasn't been forthcoming at all. This might be the only way I'm going to find out exactly what happened. I want to know the truth. I want to see the point of no return. I want all the answers," she said.

Federal prosecutors are trying to prove Salman knowingly helped a terrorist organization by scouting locations for the mass shooting with Mateen and deflecting attention away from him.

"What would make people more upset, an attack on downtown Disney or a club?" court documents quote Mateen asking his wife.

Mateen declared his support for ISIS in a 911 phone call during the shooting, and the terror group claimed responsibility in the attack.

Prosecutors further claim Salman knew Mateen bought a semi-automatic rifle, saw him buy ammunition for it and saw him leave their Fort Pierce apartment with the rifle on the night of the attack.

The defense plans to argue Salman was abused by her husband and afraid to stand up to him.

An Orlando grand jury indicted Salman in January 2017, but she'd taken off for her native California by that time. She was later arrested in the San Francisco Bay Area and brought back to Florida.

Memorial marks one year anniversary of Pulse nightclub shooting

Salman is the only person charged in one of the deadliest mass shootings in U.S. history, and she faces up to life behind bars if convicted.

The government also wants to seize about \$30,000 in hard assets Mateen amassed leading up to the shooting.

The gunman opened a bank account in Salman's name and spent \$25,000 within 10 days of the mayhem. That should've raised flags for Salman, prosecutors claim.

Salman's written confession — a lynchpin for prosecutors — is likely to come into question.

At least one medical evaluation of Salman during the year she's been in custody suggested she wasn't mentally fit and was coerced into a false confession, local ABC affiliate WFTV reports.

Salman's lawyers also argued she gave the statement after relentless questioning while her lawyer wasn't present.

The judge overseeing the case said Salman's trial could last five weeks or more after 12 jurors are chosen.

Mateen killed 49 people at the Orlando nightclub.

FBI Arrests Texas Man For Threatening Heinz Field Mass Shooting At Steelers-Jaguars Playoff Game

By Torsten Ove, Pittsburgh Post-gazette

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, March 1, 2018

A man extradited from Texas to face charges that he threatened to shoot up Heinz Field during a Pittsburgh Steelers playoff game last month appeared briefly before a federal magistrate judge on Thursday to enter a standard not guilty plea.

Yuttana Choochongkol, 40, who lives in San Antonio, is being detained without bond pending trial on orders of U.S. District Judge Arthur Schwab.

Mr. Choochongkol is charged with three counts of transmitting interstate threats.

The U.S. attorney's office said that in January he sent three communications saying he was going to shoot fans and players during the Jan. 14 game between the Steelers and the Jacksonville Jaguars.

Prosecutors said he sent KDKA-TV's website a message on Jan. 10 that he was going to carry out a mass shooting and then kill himself. He sent two other similar communications to the Heinz Field website.

The FBI's anti-terrorism squad in Pittsburgh tracked the messages to San Antonio, where he was arrested Jan. 12 and held in custody.

A federal grand jury in Pittsburgh indicted him Feb. 6.

NATIONAL SECURITY NEWS

Pentagon Dismisses Putin's Boasts About New Nuclear Weapons

By Robert Burns And Lolita C. Baldor

Associated Press, March 1, 2018

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Pentagon on Thursday dismissed Russian President Vladimir Putin's boasts about developing a new array of nuclear weapons, saying America's missile defense is ready to protect the nation but is not directed at Russia.

Putin claims that Moscow has tested weapons that cannot be intercepted and would make NATO's missile defense "useless." That assertion does little to change the long-standing nuclear standoff between the U.S. and Russia, which is rooted in deterrence and the reality that neither country would launch such weapons because doing so would mean mutual destruction. But it amps up the rhetoric and fuels worries about a new arms race.

"This is not about defense, it's about deterrence," said Pentagon spokeswoman Dana White, adding that the Defense Department was not surprised by the weapons claims. She added that U.S. missile defenses are not designed with Russia's nuclear arsenal in mind, and Moscow knows this "very well."

She added: "We need to ensure we have a credible nuclear deterrent, and we are confident that we are prepared to defend this nation no matter what."

The U.S. has consistently argued that missile defense systems in Europe are not aimed at Moscow, but rather designed to defend against threats from Iran and North Korea.

Putin, in a state-of-the-nation speech Thursday, said the new weapons include a nuclear-powered cruise missile, a nuclear-powered underwater drone that could be armed with a nuclear warhead, and a hypersonic missile that have no equivalent in the world. He said that Moscow had to develop the new weapons because the U.S. has developed a missile defense system that threatens to undermine Russia's nuclear deterrent.

The claims come just a month after the Trump administration released its new nuclear policy, which took a more aggressive stance on the need to deter Russia.

The review said Russia must be convinced that it would face "unacceptably dire costs" if it were to threaten even a limited nuclear attack in Europe. It concluded that the U.S. should continue Obama administration plans to modernize the nuclear arsenal, including new bomber aircraft, submarines and land-based missiles.

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'Now You Will Listen': Putin Claims New Nuclear Weapons Can Bypass Any Missile-defense System

By Laura King

Los Angeles Times, March 1, 2018

Russian President Vladimir Putin boasted Thursday that Russia has developed a new generation of nuclear weapons that he says are capable of bypassing any missile-defense system.

Some analysts said the bellicose tone of Putin's state of the nation speech appeared mainly meant to bolster a tough image in advance of this month's presidential election, in which his victory is a foregone conclusion.

The Pentagon said it was unsurprised by the Russian leader's remarks, suggesting they did little to alter the strategic balance between the world's nuclear superpowers.

Even so, Putin's Cold War-era rhetoric, replete with warnings that the Kremlin would respond accordingly to any nuclear attack on Russia or its allies, marked some of the most aggressive language he has deployed in the 13 months that President Trump has been in office.

"No one was listening," the Russian leader declared. "Now you will listen."

Putin's annual address to the Federal Assembly, which includes both houses of Russia's parliament, was marked by not only rhetorical flourishes, but eye-catching visuals. As he stood at the podium, animated videos and graphics projected on the large screen behind him, aiming to illustrate the might of the new weapons which included a cruise missile, underwater drone and a hypersonic missile.

The new weapons would render NATO's U.S.-led missile defense system "useless," Putin intoned as a video behind him showed a graphic of a missile weaving around purported missile defense systems on a spinning model of the Earth.

The presentation marked "a mix of old and new news," said Malcolm Chalmers, the deputy director-general of the Royal United Services Institute, a British defense think tank.

"This is an election speech he was making," said Chalmers, noting that the United States and Russia have for decades had the ability to overwhelm one another's defenses with a massive nuclear strike aimed at multiple cities — but with the deterrent factor that such a strike would be met in kind while missiles were still in the air.

Nonetheless, he and others said the new cruise missile, as described by Putin, reflects Russian fears about U.S. defensive capabilities, together with a renewed determination on Moscow's part to assert great-power status.

Thomas Karako, the director of the Missile Defense Project at the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies, said Putin's speech demonstrates a desire to "come up with new and innovative ways to deliver nuclear weapons," but also fit a larger pattern of menacing neighbors and NATO allies.

"This is an example of Russia being provocative," Karako said. "We have to take that seriously."

In his speech, Putin accused other nations of fuelling the arms race by trying to outdo Russia's weapons and

imposing sanctions meant to hinder Russia's weapons development.

"All [that] you wanted to impede with your policies already happened," he said. "You have failed to contain Russia."

The new cruise missiles, which were tested in the fall, have unlimited range and the ability to operate at high speeds, allowing them to avoid any missile defense system, according to the Russian leader, who also devoted nearly 40 minutes to touting development of underwater drones, hypersonic warheads and "menacing" intercontinental ballistic missiles.

Putin blamed the U.S. for refusing to cooperate and then withdrawing from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty.

"At some point, it seemed to me that a compromise [on missile defense with the U.S.] could be found. But no," Putin said.

Because of this, Russia was forced to create new weapons to respond to U.S. actions that deployed missile defenses on the territory of other countries, he said. Putin was likely referring to NATO's defense systems in former Warsaw Pact countries Russia has said threatens regional stability.

"For the foreseeable future, it looks that the U.S.-Russia agenda will be limited to just one item: war prevention. Good luck to us all," Dmitry Trenin, an analyst with the Carnegie Moscow Center, tweeted after Putin's address.

Striking a lighter tone, Putin announced a name-that-weapon contest for Russia's new cruise missile and an unmanned underwater drone. Participants can log onto Russia's Ministry of Defense website to enter their ideas.

"We are waiting for your responses," he said to audience applause.

With just three weeks until the March 18 presidential election, Putin's annual address was meant to outline his vision for the country for the first time since announcing his bid for reelection in December.

With an 80% approval rating, Putin — who has been either prime minister or president since 1999 — is expected to easily win a fourth term and remain in power until 2024.

Until Thursday's speech, Russian voters have heard very little about the president's goals for the next six years. The outcome of the election all but guaranteed; the buildup to the vote has been met with very little excitement from the Russian public. Seven other candidates are competing for Putin's post, although none of them are considered to be in real opposition to the Kremlin.

Putin predictably focused the first hour of the speech on Russia's domestic issues, such as poverty reduction and improving the country's health and education infrastructures.

The annual national address has in the past been held at the gilded Kremlin Palace within the Kremlin's red-brick walls. Thursday's speech was relocated to the Moscow

Manege, a 19th century exhibition hall just outside the Kremlin walls.

The audience included both houses of parliament, regional governors and members of the presidential cabinet and administration. Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev sat in the front row close to the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, Kirill, whose presence in Russian politics had played a key role in Putin's nationalistic response to what the Kremlin views are Western attempts to undermine Russia's emergence.

On the domestic side, Putin's said he was focused on reducing poverty. In order to keep up with fast pace of technical development and to protect its sovereignty, Russia should remove barriers to the development and use of robotics, artificial intelligence and other cutting-edge technologies as soon as possible, Putin said.

The Kremlin leader said Russia's economic growth, which was 1.6% in 2017, should exceed the expected global level of growth of 3.1% in 2018.

Putin Claims Russia Has Nuclear Arsenal Capable Of Avoiding Missile Defenses

By Anton Troianovski

Washington Post, March 1, 2018

MOSCOW — Russia has developed nuclear weapons that can avoid missile defense systems and plans to bolster its arsenal with nuclear-powered cruise missiles capable of hitting any point on the globe, President Vladimir Putin claimed in his annual address to lawmakers Thursday.

He also warned that Moscow would consider any nuclear attack, of any size, on it or its allies an attack on Russia that would lead to an immediate response — adopting Cold War-style overtones that appeared to ramp up Russia's posturing against the West and its allies.

Putin speech began with a rundown of domestic projects, then veered into a harsh rendering of East-West tensions and boasts over purported major advances in Russia's arsenal such as a nuclear-powered cruise missile that could strike anywhere.

Putin did not specify any of Moscow's allies that it would defend or cite any immediate threats. But his remarks could be seen as a message to Washington over souring relations with Moscow, including U.S. investigations into Russian meddling in the 2016 presidential election.

Putin said the United States had failed to take Russia's nuclear might seriously or to adequately negotiate arms control. U.S. efforts to contain Russia, he said, had failed.

"No one listened to us," Putin said. "Listen to us now."

Putin claimed that late last year, Russia had successfully tested a cruise missile that was propelled by a nuclear-powered engine. This engine gave the cruise missile

practically unlimited range, distinguishing it from existing cruise missiles.

The missile would be able to fly close to the ground and follow an unpredictable flight path, rendering existing missile defenses "useless," Putin said.

Tests of the technology "will allow the development of a complete new type of weapon — a strategic complex of nuclear arms with rockets fitted with a nuclear-propulsion engine."

"This is the start of a new Cold War," said Alexander Golts, a Moscow-based independent analyst of the Russian military. "This is an effort to scare the West."

The biggest surprise, Golts said, was Putin's announcement of a nuclear-powered cruise missile, which he said would represent a major breakthrough. Weapons experts he had spoken to after the speech, Golts said, "were all in shock, like me."

The nearly two-hour speech to top Russian officials and members of parliament began with a series of promises to improve domestic living standards and ended with stark warnings to the United States.

Russia, Putin asserted, had responded to U.S. development of missile defense shields by developing weapons impervious to them.

On the big screen behind him, video footage and computer graphics showed off the new weapons. In one animation, a missile launched from Russia was shown flying across the Atlantic, rounding the southern tip of South America, and heading up the Pacific toward the U.S. mainland.

"I hope everything that has been said today will sober any potential aggressor," Putin said.

The speech, broadcast on Russian television, comes less than three weeks before a March 18 presidential election that is expected to hand Putin his fourth term.

Putin, Before Vote, Unveils 'Invincible' Nuclear Weapons To Counter West

By Andrew Osborn

Reuters, March 1, 2018

Full-text stories from Reuters currently cannot be included in this document. You may, however, click the link above to access the story.

Putin Says 'No One In The World Has Anything Like' All-powerful Nuclear Missile

By Kim Hjelmgaard

USA Today, March 1, 2018

Russian President Vladimir Putin boasted Thursday that his country has developed a nuclear missile with an unlimited range and completely immune to enemy intercept.

Speaking during an annual state-of-the-nation speech in Moscow, Putin said the ballistic missile is capable of penetrating any missile defense and can reach virtually any target around the world. "No defense systems will be able to withstand it," he said.

NATO has nicknamed this missile — an RS-28 Sarmat rocket — "Satan 2." Russian media has claimed it could entirely wipe out an area the size of Texas or France.

Neither the White House nor the U.S. defense community offered immediate reaction. Putin has a track record of talking up his country's military and technological prowess.

Putin also unveiled what he said was Russia's new advanced weapons technology. His two-hour address included video clips of underwater drones and intercontinental missiles. Putin delivered a warning to the United States over its pursuit of anti-missile defense systems. "Efforts to contain Russia have failed, face it," he said.

"Nobody listened to us. Well, listen to us now," Putin added, referring to accusations that Washington has been violating non-nuclear proliferation agreements by assisting countries from Poland to Japan to establish global anti-missile systems.

It follows claims by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on Wednesday that the U.S. is training armed forces in Europe on how to use nuclear weapons against Russia. In his Thursday address, Putin said its new nuclear rocket effectively renders U.S. missile defense systems around the world meaningless.

"No one in the world has anything like (this weapon)," Putin said. "It may appear someday, but by that time we will develop something new."

Still, Malcom Chalmers, a defense expert at the Royal United Services Institute, a defense and security think tank, said it wasn't clear that Putin's announcement actually represented new or novel Russian military capability.

"This is Putin emphasizing that his country's new generation of missiles will be able to overcome any missile-defense systems," he said. "Russia has been able to hit targets in the U.S. and around the world since the 1960s. We also need to view his words in the context of a Russian election this month. The topic has popular appeal."

One of President Trump's first acts in office was to order Defense Secretary Jim Mattis to conduct a "nuclear posture review." Mattis' report was published in February.

It concluded that the U.S. "now faces a more diverse and advanced nuclear-threat environment than ever before, with considerable dynamism in potential adversaries' development and deployment programs for nuclear weapons and delivery systems."

The report intensely focuses on Russia, and to a lesser extent, China.

"They have added new types of nuclear capabilities to their arsenals, increased the salience of nuclear forces in their strategies and plans, and engaged in increasingly aggressive behavior, including in outer space and cyber space," the report says.

Putin Unveils Nuclear Weapons He Claims Could Breach U.S. Defenses

Russian leader sharpens rhetoric against West, intensifying arms race with the U.S.

By Thomas Grove, Michael Gordon And James Marson
Wall Street Journal, March 1, 2018

Full-text stories from the Wall Street Journal are available to Journal subscribers by clicking the link.

Putin Says New Russian Missile Can Pierce U.S. And European Defenses

By Neil Macfarquhar
New York Times, March 1, 2018

MOSCOW — President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia used his annual state of the nation speech on Thursday to threaten Western nations with a new generation of nuclear weapons, including an "invincible" intercontinental cruise missile, and to reassure ordinary Russians that considerable new social spending will improve the quality of their lives.

Mr. Putin said that team of young, high-tech specialists had labored secretly and assiduously to develop and test the new weapons, including a nuclear-powered missile that could reach virtually anywhere in the world and could not be intercepted by existing missile defense systems.

"With the missile launched and a set of ground tests completed, we can now proceed with the construction of a fundamentally new type of weapon," he said.

Given that deception lies at the heart of current Russian military doctrine, questions were raised about whether this advanced new generation of nuclear weapons actually exists. That remains unclear, but the threat from Mr. Putin increases tensions between Russia and the West and revives a bellicose rhetoric that harks back to the Cold War.

Mr. Putin's speech follows a new flurry of concern and strategic gamesmanship. In his own State of the Union address in January, President Trump insisted on the need to "modernize and rebuild" America's nuclear arsenal, declaring it a necessary part of the nation's defense.

Then, last month, the Trump administration issued a new nuclear policy, vowing to counter a rush by the Russians to modernize their forces. The strategy, which bristles with plans for new low-yield nuclear weapons, describes Mr. Putin as forcing America's hand to rebuild the nuclear force.

At the time, an administration official said President Trump was concerned about staying ahead in any nuclear race with Russia, and to a lesser degree with China.

Mr. Putin said that the missile was tested at the end of 2017. A video illustrated the weapon flying over a mountain range, then slaloming around obstacles in the southern Atlantic before rounding Cape Horn at the tip of South America and heading north toward the West Coast of the United States.

The cruise missile was among five new weapons introduced by Mr. Putin, with each shown in video mock-ups on giant screens flanking him onstage. He threatened to use the weapons and even traditional nuclear arms against the United States and Europe if Russia were ever attacked.

"We would consider any use of nuclear weapons against Russia or its allies to be a nuclear attack on our country," Mr. Putin said. "The response would be immediate."

Mr. Putin said he could not show the actual weapons publicly, but assured his audience of Russia's main political and prominent cultural figures that they had all been developed.

Mr. Putin's disclosure of the weapons touched off a debate among military experts about whether he was bluffing. If he is not, said Aleksandr M. Golts, a veteran independent Russian military analyst, then "these weapons are definitely new, absolutely new."

"If we're talking about nuclear-armed cruise missiles, that's a technological breakthrough and a gigantic achievement," he said in an interview. But, he added, "The question is, is this true?"

Several analysts writing on Facebook and elsewhere leaned toward the bluff theory. Given the recent history of Russian rockets failing to launch or crashing just after takeoff, the idea that the country suddenly possessed a seamless new generation of flying weapons strained credulity.

"The real surprise in among all of this is a nuclear-powered cruise missile," said Douglas Barrie, a senior fellow for military aerospace at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London. "It's not an entirely new concept; it was talked about in the '60s, but it ran into a lot of obstacles. To the extent that the Russians are seriously revisiting this is pretty interesting."

Such technology could alter the balance of power, but Mr. Barrie questioned whether it was close to being deployed.

"Does reality mean you have an item in the budget saying, 'Develop nuclear propulsion for a missile?'" he said. "Or does it mean, 'We're going to have one ready to use soon?' I'd certainly want to see more evidence to believe that."

Mr. Putin said Russia had developed the new weaponry because the United States had rejected established arms control treaties and was deploying new missile defense systems in Europe and Asia. The new Russian weapons would render all of that obsolete, he gloated, and if anyone else tried to develop something in response, "our boys will think of something new."

Other weapons the Russian leader discussed included a new ballistic missile called Sarmat that could round either pole and could overcome any antimissile defense system; hypersonic nuclear weaponry that flew at 20 times the speed of sound; and unmanned submarines that could operate at great depths and over huge distances at enormous speed.

Mr. Putin said that some of the weapons were so new that they had yet to be named, and announced a contest on the Ministry of Defense website for new names.

Political analysts said it was an effective campaign ploy whether the weapons existed or not. "He's giving people the image of a desired future, of a future for Russia, and that's appealing for his domestic audience," said Aleksei V. Makarkin, the deputy head of the Center for Political Technologies, a Moscow think tank.

Mr. Putin's guns-and-butter, Russia-can-do-it-all speech came 17 days before the March 18 presidential election. It seemed designed to reassure voters that expanded social spending would help salve the economic problems of the past four years, while simultaneously sending the message that Mr. Putin was their best hope in protecting a Russia portrayed as a besieged fortress.

Mr. Putin has been largely absent from the campaign trail, so many Russians had expected that the state of the nation speech, delayed since December, would offer some vision of what the president had in store for his fourth and likely final term.

They got their answer: Russia would become a superpower again.

The fact that the country does not have the money to pay for a giant increase in social spending combined with a new generation of weapons was beside the point, Mr. Makarkin said. And never mind that the combination of social and military spending is what helped bring down the Soviet Union.

"People may say Russia depends on oil, Russia doesn't have the money, but the population at large doesn't care about that," he said. "They just want to know that we are a superpower."

The transition from butter to guns in Mr. Putin's two-hour speech was as sudden as it was unexpected. From talking about the future development of the country for over an hour, he suddenly launched into an extended threat to the West.

"From tales about progress, the speech flowed into an open-ended declaration of world war," Gleb O. Pavlovsky, a political analyst and former Kremlin consultant, wrote on Facebook.

The speech was delivered at the Manege, an old Czarist riding school outside the Kremlin walls that now is now an exhibition space. The speech was moved from inside the Kremlin itself, the traditional venue, to accommodate the

giant screens used to present both a rosy picture of future social spending and videos of the weapons.

It was also moved from December, when Mr. Putin has given his past state of the nation speeches, to March to coincide with the impending presidential election that he is assured of winning.

On the social front, he promised to double government spending on health care and raise pensions for the elderly. He said Russia would reduce the poverty rate — official statistics indicate that around 14 million Russians live below the poverty line — by 2014. By that year, too, five million Russian families will move into new housing, he said, and even sooner the mortgage interest rate will fall to 7 percent.

Mr. Putin also said that life expectancy, currently at 73, a huge leap from when he first took office in 2000, should be above 80 by 2030.

Critics doubt that Russia will ever have the means to deliver so much, given its stumbling economy and relatively depressed oil prices. Max Trudolyubov, a newspaper columnist and political analyst, called the entire speech a modern version of the Czar Cannon, a giant 16th-century piece of armament that sits on the Kremlin grounds and that legend holds never really worked.

The speech was addressed as much to the Americans as anyone, Mr. Trudolyubov wrote in a Facebook commentary, since Mr. Putin appears bored by the election campaign itself. "In the mind of the author of the message there is something disturbing about America, everything is decided in America," the analyst wrote.

For years, Mr. Putin has chafed at the perceived disrespect showed to him and Russia by the United States as the world's lone superpower. "Nobody listened to Russia," he said near the end of the speech, to huge applause. "Well, listen up now."

Putin Speech Adds To Freeze In U.S.-Russia Relations

By Karen Deyoung

Washington Post, March 1, 2018

It may still be far from the depths of the Cold War, but Russian President Vladimir Putin's Thursday speech, outlining new, "invincible" weapons to overcome U.S. defenses, lowered the already chilly temperature of the relationship by several degrees.

Few experts on either side believe that the new weapons, assuming they actually exist and are ever deployed, would change the balance of power between two nations that already have the ability to destroy each other many times over.

At the same time, there is widespread agreement that the rhetorical attacks, stalled diplomacy and military

escalation that increasingly characterize U.S.-Russia relations are counterproductive to global security.

Russia and the United States have a lot to talk about, on such topics as arms control, cyber intrusions, Ukraine, Syria and beyond. But there are no easy answers on how to break what appears to be an inexorable slide into a deeper freeze and little optimism that dialogue is about to break out.

"The tension level is high, higher now than it was several months ago, in part because the Russians have gotten past the phase where they thought with President Trump they would be able to move the relationship in a different direction," said Thomas Graham, senior director for Russia on the George W. Bush National Security Council staff and now managing director at Kissinger Associates Inc.

"This is qualitatively worse than any post-Cold War period," Graham said.

Trump appears to be the only senior member of his administration who still believes in a thaw. He has praised Putin's honesty and directness after meeting with him in person and recalled his own campaign aspirations for closer ties. He has yet to take a stand against the election interference that U.S. intelligence agencies have confirmed, largely because he fears it will undercut his own legitimacy, according to administration officials.

But as he has failed to move relations forward, "the Russians basically see the Trump administration as a lost cause," said Andrew Weiss, who held senior Russia policy positions during both the Bill Clinton and George W. Bush administrations and is now vice president for studies at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

"On the one hand, [the administration] is mired in this intense political crisis," in part over allegations of Trump campaign ties to Moscow. "On the other hand, it's got this obvious level of dysfunction and incoherence. Trump is saying only nice things about Russia," Weiss said, while "the national security cabinet around him has pretty mainstream views of Russia as an adversary."

U.S. defense officials have consistently cited Russia as the most significant strategic threat to the United States, and the primary reason to build up its defense budget.

Gen. John Hyten, who leads U.S. Strategic Command, said in a speech Wednesday that Russia poses "the only existential threat to the country."

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson has said that there will be no warming of relations with Russia until it abandons its 2014 annexation of Crimea, something Russia has vowed never to do. The administration has reversed an Obama-era prohibition against providing lethal weapons to the Ukrainian military. In the first major implementation of that decision, it notified Congress on Thursday of plans to sell 210 antitank missiles to Ukraine.

Tillerson has also come down increasingly hard on Russia for failing to control the brutal attacks against civilians

by the government of President Bashar al-Assad that it supports in Syria.

Russia not only is providing air cover for the regime but also is "responsible" for Assad's use of chemical weapons, Tillerson has said on numerous occasions. "They can deny it all they want to, but facts are facts," he told Fox News last month.

Both the United States and Russia have now outlined expansions of their nuclear arsenals, and it remains unclear whether New START, the primary arms-reduction treaty in effect between the two, will remain viable beyond its expiration date of 2021. Each has also charged the other with violations of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty.

As both have rapidly increased their defense budgets, "this is a time when there ought to be some serious conversations about arms control," said Steven Pifer, a Russia expert during 25 years as a Foreign Service officer and a now senior fellow at the Brookings Institution.

"What I worry about is, I'm not sure where the push comes from, Washington or Moscow, to get to a serious arms-control dialogue," Pifer said. There must be "some sensible thing" to be done to "find a way to save INF and give a quick extension to New START."

Despite their criticisms, both Tillerson and defense officials have stressed the importance of finding a path to dialogue with Moscow. That is not the case with Congress, which overwhelmingly passed recent legislation directing Trump to impose new sanctions on Russia. So far, the president has not taken action.

The legislation and congressional restraints create even more complications for the administration, Weiss said, because "anything that looks like a giveaway to Putin would be dead on arrival in the Senate."

"The problem we have," he said, "is that we're entering this world where the framework that we've used to manage U.S.-Russia relations is in parlous conditions," even as "both sides are engaged in activities that make the other very nervous."

Two dates are seen as key in Russia's military expansion and broadened reach on the world stage. U.S. withdrawal in 2002 from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty — followed by development of more sophisticated antimissile defenses — were seen by Russia as a way to undermine its own strategic nuclear arsenal. Twelve years later, Russia's occupation and annexation of Crimea marked a major step in what it sees as its post-Soviet Union return to its rightful place on the global stage.

The Ukraine intervention was quickly followed by Russia's military support of Assad — moves it said were justified under international law to support a sovereign government, unlike the uninvited U.S. military intervention against the Islamic State in Syria.

A new analysis by the Carnegie Endowment sums up a "broad, sophisticated, well-resourced and ... surprisingly effective campaign" by Russia "to expand its global reach" at the same time the United States has pulled back from its global leadership role.

It identifies four tools used by Moscow, depending on its aims and the opportunities in different regions and countries. They include economic measures such as debt relief, bailouts and investments, as it is using in Venezuela to prop up the government of President Nicolás Maduro.

Moscow had also cultivated, promoted and funded the influence of friendly political figures, particularly among right-wing leaders such as Prime Minister Viktor Orban in Hungary. In other parts of Europe, as in the United States, it has used social media and cyber-operations to disrupt societies and promote divisions.

Fourth, it has "taken advantage of instability throughout the Middle East and U.S. retrenchment to rebuild ties with governments and regimes across the region," the Carnegie analysis said. Beyond Syria, Russia has also become a player in Libya — where it supports Gen. Khalifa Hifter, a maverick military leader competing for power there. Russia has also aggressively pursued arms sales to some of the United States' closest allies in the region.

Faced with an array of problems in the U.S.-Russia relationship, some experts cautioned against overreacting to a speech they said was mostly aimed at a domestic audience, in advance of this month's presidential election there.

While his win is virtually guaranteed, Putin seeks validation with a massive turnout and majority. But with a stagnant economy, "he has nothing serious to offer the average Russian," Pifer said. "So what does he do? He hypes the American" threat.

Others drew a larger lesson. "If you missed the Cold War, it looked a lot like right now," said Joe Circincione, president of the Ploughshares Fund, a foundation based on nuclear weapons policy.

US Plans To Sell 210 Anti-tank Missiles To Ukraine

By Josh Lederman

Associated Press, March 1, 2018

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Trump administration plans to sell Ukraine 210 anti-tank missiles to help it defend its territory from Russia, in a major escalation of U.S. lethal assistance to Ukraine's military.

The State Department is telling Congress it plans to approve the \$47 million sale. Congress has 30 days to block the sale but is not expected to do so. Lawmakers from both parties have long pushed government to provide the weapons.

The move comes the same day that Russian President Vladimir Putin announced his country has developed new nuclear weapons he claims can't be intercepted by an enemy.

In its notice to Congress, the State Department says it plans to sell 37 command launch units along with the 210 American-made Javelin missiles. The missiles will come from existing U.S. Army stockpiles.

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Trump, South Korean President Agree That Talks With North Korea Must Focus On Denuclearization

By Dave Boyer

Washington Times, March 1, 2018

President Trump and South Korean President Moon Jae-in agreed in a phone call Thursday that any talks with North Korea must have the "explicit" goal of denuclearizing Pyongyang.

The White House said Mr. Moon briefed the president on progress toward inter-Korean talks.

"President Trump and President Moon noted their firm position that any dialogue with North Korea must be conducted with the explicit and unwavering goal of complete, verifiable, and irreversible denuclearization," the White House said.

North Korea said after the Winter Olympics ended last week in South Korea that it was willing to engage in talks.

Mr. Trump told the nation's governors this week that the U.S. also wants talks, but "only under the right conditions."

"Otherwise," he said, "we're not talking."

The White House said Mr. Trump also congratulated Mr. Moon on the success of the Olympic Games.

South Korea's Moon Tells Trump Of Plan To Send Envoy To North Korea

Reuters, March 1, 2018

Full-text stories from Reuters currently cannot be included in this document. You may, however, click the link above to access the story.

South Korea Tells U.S. It Will Send Envoy To North Korea

By Choe Sang-Hun

New York Times, March 1, 2018

SEOUL, South Korea — President Moon Jae-in of South Korea told President Trump on Thursday that he planned to send a special envoy to North Korea as part of his effort to broker talks between the United States and the North on ending its nuclear weapons program.

President Moon's office said he talked with Mr. Trump on the phone on Thursday to discuss joint strategies, based upon the discussions Mr. Moon and his aides have held with senior North Korean officials who visited the South last month to attend the opening and closing ceremonies of the Olympics in Pyeongchang.

"The two heads of state agreed to keep the momentum in South-North Korean dialogue and continue efforts to use it to lead to the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula," Mr. Moon's office said in a statement. "To that end, President Moon notified President Trump that his government will soon send a special envoy to the North to confirm the discussions it has held with the high-level North Korean delegates."

By sending a special envoy to North Korea, Mr. Moon was also reciprocating the visit to the South by Kim Yo-jong, the sister and trusted aide of the North Korean leader, Kim Jong-un, it said. Mr. Kim sent his sister to attend the opening ceremony of the Olympics last month and to deliver his invitation to Mr. Moon to visit the North for an inter-Korean summit meeting.

Mr. Kim sent another high-level delegation, led by his former spy chief, Kim Yong-chol, to attend the closing ceremony on Sunday. The delegates told Mr. Moon that North Korea was willing to start talks with Washington, although it remained unclear whether it was ready to discuss denuclearization, as Washington has demanded.

Mr. Moon is eager to use the diplomatic opening created by the Olympics and the visits of the North Korean envoys to help arrange for the United States and North Korea to sit down for talks, as well as to improve inter-Korean relations.

His immediate challenge is how to narrow the wide gap between the United States and North Korea over the terms under which they would start a dialogue.

North Korea says it will not bargain away its nuclear weapons, and it insists that the United States first recognize it as a nuclear power. Only then, the North Koreans say, will they sit down with American officials to discuss mutual arms reduction on the Korean Peninsula.

On Monday, Mr. Trump said the Americans "want to talk also" — but "only under the right conditions." "Otherwise," he said, "we're not talking."

That has been the consistent American stance since the administration of President Barack Obama, although Mr. Trump, unlike Mr. Obama, has openly threatened to use military force to end the nuclear crisis. For its part, North Korea drastically escalated the stakes by conducting its sixth and most powerful nuclear test and test-firing intercontinental ballistic missiles last year.

Washington insists that it is not interested in talks unless they deal with denuclearizing the North. United States officials say the North has failed to abide by agreements in

past negotiations, and they demand that the North first show its sincerity before talks can start.

Mr. Moon has said that if North Korea announced a freeze in its nuclear and missile tests, it would help start talks between the North and the United States.

But even if North Korea agrees to such a freeze, it is widely expected to demand that the United States reciprocate, perhaps by suspending its annual joint military exercises with South Korea, analysts said. It remains unclear whether Mr. Trump is ready to offer such a concession. Mr. Moon's government says that the allies will announce their plans regarding the joint war games after the Paralympics end in Pyeongchang on March 18.

Mr. Moon has urged the United States and North Korea to soften their uncompromising stances so that talks could start on defusing the crisis, which appeared to push the Korean Peninsula to the brink of war in the past year.

"The United States needs to lower the threshold for dialogue, and North Korea should express a willingness to denuclearize," Mr. Moon said on Monday.

Mr. Moon, a longtime proponent of reconciliation with North Korea, wants to accept Kim Jong-un's proposal for an early summit meeting to improve ties and further lower tensions, analysts have said. But to make his inter-Korean agenda sustainable, Mr. Moon needs the United States and North Korea to make progress in denuclearization talks.

North Korea, Finally, Feels The Sting Of International Sanctions

By Jeremy Page, Andrew Jeong and Ian Talley
[Wall Street Journal](#), March 1, 2018

Full-text stories from the Wall Street Journal are available to Journal subscribers by clicking the link.

U.S. Commanders Forecast 10,000 American Casualties In War With North Korea

By Carlo Muñoz
[Washington Times](#), March 1, 2018

As many as 10,000 U.S. service members would end up wounded or dead in the opening days of a potential war with North Korea, with civilian casualties possibly reaching into the hundreds of thousands, says a recent U.S. military assessment of a future conflict on the peninsula.

The casualty assessment was one of several generated during a large-scale virtual wargame, known as a tabletop exercise in Pentagon parlance, conducted by several service and combatant commanders including Army Chief of Staff Gen. Mark Milley and U.S. Special Operations Command chief Gen. Tony Thomas, The New York Times reported Thursday.

The wargame, held at U.S. Pacific Command's headquarters in Hawaii, put on stark display the devastating cost of engaging in all-out war with the North Korean regime.

"The brutality of this will be beyond the experience of any living soldier," Gen. Milley reportedly said after seeing the results of the exercise, according to *The Times*.

Results of the recent wargame come as the White House continues raising tensions in the region, touting the fact that all options — including military action — remain on the table in an effort to curb Pyongyang's nuclear ambitions. Officials within the Trump administration have also suggested a series of non-nuclear, preemptive strikes dubbed the "bloody nose" option to force the North to ratchet down their actions.

Goodwill generated between Pyongyang, Seoul and the U.S. as a result of the recent Olympic games prompted Mr. Trump to suggest his administration would be open to some form of talks with the North Korean regime.

That said, Washington remains intent on moving forward with this year's Foal Eagle exercises, in spite of claims by Pyongyang that such a move could have a chilling effect on those seemingly warming relations.

U.S. and South Korean commanders are in the process of zeroing in on a start date for the exercise, known as Foal Eagle, after being forced to postpone the drill due to the Olympics, Pentagon spokesman Col. Rob Manning told reporters Monday.

He declined to comment on what dates both countries were considering for the exercise, one of the largest military drills in the world, but noted "it will be an alliance decision when that [exercise] will occur," Col. Manning told reporters at the Pentagon.

Officials in Pyongyang warned that any military drills set to take place after the games in Pyeongchang, South Korea, "seriously threatened, and hard-won atmosphere for reconciliation and cooperation between the north and the south were spoilt in a moment," according to a statement issued on state-run media outlet Korean Central News Agency last week.

Iraqi Parliament Demands Timeline For U.S. Troop Pullout

By Guy Taylor

Washington Times, March 1, 2018

The U.S. military says the fate of its ongoing presence in Iraq will be decided in "coordination with" and will depend on the "approval of" the government in Baghdad.

The comments by Col. Ryan Dillon, a spokesman for the U.S.-led coalition that battled the Islamic State in Iraq, came in response to Iraqi parliament's demand Thursday that a timeline be set for the pullout of foreign troops from the country.

Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi declared victory over ISIS in December. But as many as 5,000 U.S. troops are still stationed in Iraq, and the parliament in Baghdad voted by overwhelming majority Thursday that Mr. Abadi must now establish a schedule for their withdrawal.

In response, Col. Dillon told Reuters that the continued presence of U.S. forces "will be conditions-based, proportional to need, in coordination with and by the approval of the Iraqi government."

A Reuters report Thursday asserted that the Iraqi parliament's demand underscores a balancing act Mr. Abadi must conduct between the United States and Iran, his two biggest military allies who are themselves arch-adversaries.

There are no Iranian regular forces in Iraq, but there are Iranian-backed Shia Muslim militias allied with Mr. Abadi's government, the news agency noted, adding that Thursday's parliamentary vote — backed by all but a handful of 177 lawmakers present — was sponsored by lawmakers from the ruling Shia bloc in parliament.

Reuters quoted political analyst Ahmed Younis as saying the timing of the vote, ahead of high-stakes parliamentary elections slated for May in Iraq, was a "message from pro-Iran parties that they do not want American troops in Iraq forever."

While Mr. Abadi himself is seeking a second term in the elections, other analysts say the Iran-backed militias in Iraq — inspired by the political success had in recent years in Lebanon by the Tehran-supported Hezbollah organization — are also gearing up to win seats in Iraqi parliament.

The heads of several of the Iran-backed militias banded together last fall to form a Shia political movement. Dubbed the Mujahideen Coalition, the movement includes representatives from the Shia-led Badr Organization, Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq, also known as the Khazali Network, Kata'ib Hezbollah and other Shia militias that battled ISIS in Iraq under the banner of the so-called "Popular Mobilization Forces."

Some believe the move threatens to exacerbate sectarian tensions between Iraq's Sunni and Shia populations, while increasing concern in Washington over Iranian influence in Baghdad at a time when the Iraqi capital is already clashing with Kurds over their own semi-autonomous region in the country's north.

Ahmad Majidiyar, director of the Middle East Institute's Iran Observed Project, told *The Washington Times* in January that the militias behind the Mujahideen Coalition are "the same groups that have been trained and supported by Iran for the last decade."

If Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei so desired, Mr. Majidiyar said, the groups "would be willing to topple the government in Baghdad."

The Long War Journal, a publication of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies — a Washington think tank

known for its aggressive scrutiny of Iran — put it more subtly. The new political coalition is backed by Iran's Islamic Republican Guards Corps and is "poised to shape the next Iraqi government," the Journal said in an analysis published in late January.

UN Official: Pauses In Syria Suburb Unilateral, 'Not Enough'

By Bassem Mroue And Jamey Keaten

Associated Press, March 1, 2018

BEIRUT (AP) — The five-hour daily pauses in fighting in Syria's embattled eastern suburbs of the capital Damascus — laid out under a "unilateral" plan by Russia — are not enough to take in aid or evacuate civilians, a top U.N. aid official said Thursday.

Jan Egeland also said the U.N. Security Council resolution over the weekend calling for a 30-day cease-fire has done little to improve the situation in the rebel-held region east of Damascus.

"Since it was adopted, it did not get better — it got worse," he said.

Eastern Ghouta was among the first areas to rise up against President Bashar Assad's rule in 2011. The area was taken over by rebels as unrest turned into an armed insurgency, then a full-blown civil war now seven years old.

Egeland's comments came after the Russian military accused Syria's rebels of shelling a humanitarian corridor that Moscow set up with the Syrian government, offering residents of Damascus' besieged eastern suburbs a way out of the embattled enclave.

Later on Thursday, Maj.-Gen. Yuri Yevtushenko, chief of the Russian center for reconciliation of conflicting sides in Syria, said militants in Ghouta were carrying out public executions of people who want to leave the area. He said "the hotline of the Russian reconciliation center has begun receiving calls about public executions of those who are trying to flee from the enclave."

Russian President Vladimir Putin had ordered a five-hour daily humanitarian pause to allow civilians to exit the region. The daily pauses began on Tuesday but so far, no humanitarian aid has gone in — and no civilians have left the area, except for an elderly Pakistani man and his wife who were evacuated from the town of Douma on Thursday.

The Syrian Red Crescent confirmed it managed to evacuate the family to Damascus, handing them over to the Pakistani embassy. The Kumait news agency, close to the Army of Islam rebel group headquartered in Douma, reported that the man and his wife had been living in Syria for more than 40 years and were evacuated after months of negotiations.

Egeland, who heads humanitarian aid matters in the office of the U.N. Syria envoy, said the Russian plan for the

five-hour pauses was "positive" but insufficient. He said that no aid has been sent to eastern Ghouta because "we did not get a single facilitation letter by the government."

"I know of no humanitarian actor ... who thinks that five hours is enough for us to be able to deliver relief into eastern Ghouta and to organize orderly medical evacuations out," he said.

He said a meeting of the U.N.'s humanitarian task force for Syria earlier Thursday discussed the issue of: "Can we sit down now with Russia and others and see whether we can help make this pause/initiative meet humanitarian standards for a pause and a corridor."

The eastern suburbs — a cluster of several towns and villages on Damascus' eastern edge — have faced a deadly and brutal onslaught for weeks by Syrian government troops, backed by Russia.

The United Nations satellite agency said Thursday that an analysis of images showed widespread new damage in the opposition-held eastern suburbs of Damascus. The preliminary analysis conducted by UNOSAT of satellite imagery from the eastern Ghouta towns of Kafr Batna and Arbeen showed damage in a 62.5-square-kilometer (24-square-mile) area, with buildings completely destroyed or damaged since Dec. 3.

The analysis appeared to reflect the ferocious fighting that has occurred in the suburb over the past month.

Residents of eastern Ghouta say they do not trust the Russia-declared truce and the U.N. and aid agencies have criticized the unilateral arrangement, saying it gave no guarantees of safety for residents wishing to leave.

They also fear their region could meet the same fate as the eastern, rebel-held half of the city of Aleppo, where a similar Russian-ordered pause in 2016 called on residents to evacuate the area and for gunmen to lay down their arms.

A full ground assault followed, finally bringing Aleppo under government control in December 2016.

The U.N. envoy for Syria Staffan de Mistura insisted that a government-led assault on eastern Ghouta must not devolve into a "copycat" of the bloody siege on Aleppo.

"We cannot afford to have the luxury of giving up. So any type of feeling that the U.N. is frustrated: Forget it," he said.

Russian Maj. Gen. Vladimir Zolotukhin told Russia news agencies earlier in the day that the militants who control the suburbs are shelling the route, manned by Syrian and Russian forces, and preventing evacuations.

State-run al-Ikhbariya TV reported that dozens of civilians had gathered on the edge of eastern Ghouta to leave, but were prevented by insurgents from reaching a crossing point into government-controlled areas.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said before the truce went into effect at 9 a.m. on Thursday, government shelling and airstrikes on eastern

Ghouta killed nine people. The opposition's Syrian Civil Defense, also known as the White Helmets, said a total of 12 people were killed on Thursday.

State-run Syrian Arab News Agency, or SANA, said Thursday that a civilian was wounded by a mortar shell fired by the insurgents in eastern Ghouta at the Bab al-Salam area in the old city of Damascus.

"The conditions are still very bad," said Ghouta opposition activist Anas al-Dimashqi adding that five missiles hit near his house Thursday morning, inflicting casualties and damage.

The Russia-ordered pause came after a U.N. Security Council resolution calling for a nationwide 30-day cease-fire failed to take hold. While the relentless bombing has somewhat subsided in eastern Ghouta, home to around 400,000 civilians, the Syrian government's push to squeeze the insurgents out of the region continued.

U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric on Thursday reiterated Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' call for "a full and immediate implementation" of the Security Council resolution demanding a 30-day cease-fire.

Elsewhere in Syria, a convoy of 28 trucks carrying aid entered the northern Kurdish enclave of Afrin, where Turkish troops have been on the offensive since Jan. 20 against Syrian Kurdish fighters. The government-controlled Syrian Central Military Media said Turkish troops and Turkey-backed opposition fighters targeting the convoy near the village of Marimameen.

The International Committee of the Red Cross that carried out the operation with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent, said the convoy carried stuff including 7,450 food baskets, enough for 50,000 people, in addition to mattresses, blankets and diapers.

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Poland And Israel In Tense Talks Over Law Likened To Holocaust Denial

By Isabel Kershner And Joanna Berendt

New York Times, March 1, 2018

JERUSALEM — Polish and Israeli officials met on Thursday to address the diplomatic rift that erupted over a new Polish law that makes it a crime to blame Poland for the Holocaust, a measure that Israeli officials have likened to Holocaust denial.

The law, adopted last month over the furious objections of Israel and scholars from around the world, makes it a crime to blame "the Polish nation" for the Holocaust and other World War II atrocities carried out by the Nazis during their occupation from 1939 to 1945.

It was the Nazis who oversaw the exterminations — by means of mass shootings, gas chambers, starvation and slave labor — that claimed the lives of some six million Jews. But the role of Polish collaborators, participants and enablers in the Nazi-run system of mechanized death remains a subject of fraught historical inquiry.

Poland's right-wing government says its goal is to defend the nation from slander, but scholars say the result is to stifle inquiry and reconciliation.

Last week, a group of Poles who risked their lives to save Jews during World War II added their voices to the debate.

"We ask you not to rewrite history," the Poles — among 6,850 Poles recognized by Yad Vashem, the Holocaust memorial center in Jerusalem, as "righteous among the nations" for their heroism — wrote in an open letter to both Polish and Israeli leaders.

One of those who signed the letter was Anna Stupnicka-Bando, 89, who was a teenager when she and her mother smuggled books and food into the Warsaw ghetto. It was during one of those illegal trips that they met an 11-year-old Jewish girl, Liliana Adler, whom they hid in their two-bedroom apartment at her father's urging.

Posing as Anna's cousin, Liliana lived with the family — under their neighbors' suspicious gazes — for four years until they were liberated by the Soviet Army in 1945.

"Everyone knows that there were those who were good and those who were bad," Ms. Stupnicka-Bando said in a phone interview. "Those who were saving Jews, and those who were robbing and murdering them. There were heroes just as there were thieves and killers. Just like there were in every other nation. To say different is harmful and nonsensical."

She added: "What is it now with all this counting — this checking how many of us were good and how many were bad? We are not some potatoes planted in a field that can be counted. We are people. Let it go."

Ms. Stupnicka-Bando said the new dispute was unnecessary. "In recent years, we had finally managed to get some peace and quiet," she said. "It seemed like all those conflicts and tensions were gone. How can they be back? How can one unfortunate phrase, one inaccurately written sentence destroy all of it?"

On Thursday, Israeli and Polish diplomats met for more than three hours in what the Israeli Foreign Ministry described as "candid and open dialogue," although the talks were inconclusive.

The Israeli side was represented by Yuval Rotem, the ministry's director general, and included diplomats, legal experts and historians from Yad Vashem.

At the start of the talks, Mr. Rotem told the Polish team — led by the deputy foreign minister, Bartosz Cichocki — that

it was "no secret" that the legislation was "a matter of concern to Israel and to the Jewish people worldwide."

He added: "We must make sure that historical truths are preserved, that there be no restrictions on the freedom of research and speech, and that the wide threat of criminalization in this regard is addressed and resolved."

After the closed-door talks, the ministry said it was especially concerned about "the criminalization clause, which constitutes an obstacle to the study of the truth and to open historical debate."

The statement also expressed "concern about the public atmosphere that had recently been created in Poland and manifestations of anti-Semitism, and stressed the need for the Polish government to act with zero tolerance in the face of anti-Semitism."

The dispute has strained relations between Israel and Poland. At a security conference last month in Munich, Israel's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, confronted his Polish counterpart, Mateusz Morawiecki.

During a discussion, Ronen Bergman, a journalist who covers intelligence affairs for Yediot Ahronot and writes for The New York Times Magazine, remarked that his parents, who were born in Poland, "lost much of their families because their Polish neighbors snitched to the Gestapo."

He added, "After the war my mother swore she would never speak Polish for the rest of her life, not even a single word."

In a rambling response, Mr. Morawiecki said it would remain legal "to say that there were Polish perpetrators, as there were Jewish perpetrators, as there were Russian perpetrators, as there were Ukrainian, not only German perpetrators."

The reference to "Jewish perpetrators" infuriated Israelis and others. Mr. Netanyahu called the comments "outrageous" and added, "There is a problem here of an inability to understand history and a lack of sensitivity to the tragedy of our people."

Even so, Mr. Netanyahu has resisted pressure from legislators — including some from within his governing coalition — to recall Israel's ambassador to Poland.

In an opinion article in Haaretz on Thursday, the deputy prime minister of Poland, Jaroslaw Gowin, said that Israeli-Polish cooperation had improved in recent years and urged further dialogue.

How the law will be enforced remains to be seen. Historians, journalists and artists are to be exempted from prosecution under the law, and Joanna Kopcinska, a government spokeswoman, said that "witnesses of history" would also be exempt.

The Polish government, which has also curbed judicial independence and the press, is feuding with the European Union over the state of the rule of law in Poland.

On Thursday, the European Parliament adopted a resolution supporting the European Commission, the bloc's executive body, which has threatened to strip Poland of voting rights because of threats to democratic norms.

The commission warned Poland this week that it had until March 20 to backtrack on its judicial changes before Brussels takes action. "The clock is ticking," Michael Roth, Germany's minister for European Union affairs, told journalists.

The tensions on both fronts might have given the governing Law and Justice party pause. This week, the speaker of Parliament delayed debate on a proposal to establish a day of memorial honoring Poles who saved Jews.

Ms. Stupnicka-Bando said she hoped the current tensions were a result of a "misunderstanding and not ill will." She added, "We, the righteous ones, are optimists."

Ewa Junczyk-Ziomecka, the president of the Jan Karski Educational Foundation, which organized the open letter, noted that many of the letter's signers were in their 90s, and she worried that memories of righteous acts were fading.

"They are worried that their legacy — the mutual understanding between Poles and Jews they achieved — might now be lost," Ms. Junczyk-Ziomecka said.

She added that it would be important to study the experiences of both groups — Jews inside the ghetto walls, non-Jewish Poles in their occupied country.

"Jews and Poles spent years learning about what is a source of pain for the Jews, and what it is in the Polish soul that hurts," Ms. Junczyk-Ziomecka said. "Their memories complete each other. They can't imagine that someone might break them apart."

Guatemala Appeals For More U.S. Help To Combat Drug Trafficking

By Michelle Nichols

[Reuters](#), March 1, 2018

Full-text stories from Reuters currently cannot be included in this document. You may, however, click the link above to access the story.

Haley Visits Guatemala Looking For Ways To Fight Drugs And Corruption

By Carol Morello

[Washington Post](#), March 1, 2018

GUATEMALA CITY — The teenager sitting beside Nikki Haley had a red scar along her jaw line, and elastic bandages covered her arms.

She had clasped Haley's hand as she guided the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations around the shelter where she lives. Haley gently placed one hand on the girl's knee, encouraging her to tell her story.

She talked haltingly of surviving a fire at a state-run orphanage where 41 girls died in a locked room. Now, the dead girls and the 15 survivors have come to symbolize much that is wrong in Guatemala — the deepening poverty, the crying need for social services and the cronyism that brought inexperienced leadership to the agency that oversaw the home.

"The pain you have — pull something out of it to make you feel it was worth it," Haley said. "We aren't defined by what happens to us. We are defined by what you do with it. You are meant for great things."

Haley's visit to the shelter, which just got \$2.2 million in U.S. aid, was part of her vaguely defined trip to Central America to determine whether she can push counternarcotics and anti-corruption initiatives at the United Nations. Everywhere she went, she met with people who want U.S. funding to continue or be expanded.

The time Haley has spent with ordinary citizens sets her apart from other officials who have visited the region with a similar agenda. On her overseas travels, she often makes a point of talking to women and girls like those in El Refugio, where she met the burn victim. She thinks of them as a truth squad and frequently mentions them in her U.N. speeches.

"Women really are great at being blunt and telling the truth," she said. "They're great at identifying challenges but also have an interest in solutions."

It is no coincidence that Haley visited Guatemala and Honduras. The two countries sided with the United States on a resolution condemning the U.S. recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital. That prompted her pledge to "take names" of the 128 countries that denounced the U.S. move.

Haley says she is convinced the United Nations can play a role in curbing international trafficking in drugs and humans, although she is not clear how. Her talks with the presidents of Guatemala and Honduras focused not only on traditional U.N. concerns but also bilateral issues more typically addressed by the secretary of state.

At a meeting Wednesday, Haley told Guatemalan President Jimmy Morales, a former television comic who was elected in 2015, that the United States supports a United Nations-backed anti-corruption panel and its head, Iván Velásquez. Morales has sparred with Velásquez over a fraud investigation that implicated the president's brother and son, and has sought Velásquez's removal.

Haley said she told Morales that it was "in his best interest" to support the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), which gets \$44 million, almost a third of its budget, from the United States. She also met with officials from the commission, urging them not to tout their approval ratings, which are higher than the government's, or pass out bumper stickers saying "I love CICIG."

"I told them they should be like the FBI," she said. "Everybody knows they do their job, but they do it quietly."

"They don't need to be in the paper every day," she added.

The commission, which has operated in Guatemala for a decade, sees its anti-corruption efforts as integral to fighting poverty and malnutrition in a country where 7 in 10 people are officially poor, and half live in extreme poverty.

"At the end of the day, we are trying to strengthen democracy here in Guatemala," said Osvaldo Lapuente, an official with the commission. "We think the U.S. is a really important ally for us in that agenda."

On Thursday, Haley flew to a Guatemalan naval base that has played a key role in maritime interdictions of boats used to smuggle cocaine north from Colombia. Standing in an open-air auditorium where seized cocaine is laid out for cataloguing, she heard Guatemalan officials make a pitch for more planes, boats and equipment to replace their aging fleet.

An old U.S. ship from the Vietnam War era stood on blocks in the shipyard, its interdiction days over. Nearby were dozens of seized fishing boats and a handful of homemade submarines fashioned from fiberglass, canvas and duct tape. The newest ships, 11 Boston Whalers, are eight years old and often run out of gas mid-mission.

Last year, Guatemalan crews seized more than 10,000 kilos of cocaine, a 40 percent increase over the previous year. But they say they could do more.

"We want more equipment and training," said Enrique Degenhart, the government minister in charge of police and security. "We're not asking for boots on the ground. We're basically looking to be more efficient."

As U.S. Gun Debate Rages On, Australians Hand In 57,000 Firearms, And Norway Is Set For A Broad Ban

By Rick Noack

Washington Post, March 1, 2018

As more U.S. companies were showing support for stricter gun laws this week, two foreign governments announced Wednesday that they had made significant progress on restricting access to firearms.

In Australia, authorities revealed that citizens had handed over 57,000 illegal firearms between July and September last year during a gun amnesty. In total, more than 35,000 rifles and more than 12,000 shotguns were turned in, among other firearms.

Meanwhile, the Norwegian government now appears to have a majority for its plan to ban semiautomatic rifles — similar to those used in a string of deadly mass shootings in the United States — by 2021, despite protests from farmers and hunters.

If passed, the Norwegian law would classify previously legal rifles used by hunters as "military-style" weapons. It would be accompanied by other measures, such as upgraded background checks before handgun purchases, according to Peter Frolich of the Norwegian parliament's judicial affairs committee, who spoke to the Associated Press.

Both initiatives indicate the lengths to which governments have gone in response to mass shootings in their respective countries.

Australia's firearms amnesty is based on a nationwide scheme that followed a mass shooting at a tourist site in the country in 1996 that left 35 people dead. At the time, the Australian government decided to buy back firearms and strengthen gun-control laws, managing to significantly reduce the number of weapons in circulation.

The Australian measure is based on the assumption that any reduction of the number of available weapons that could fall into the wrong hands can help prevent shootings – and there is some statistical evidence for this. In his study published in 2016, "Public Mass Shooters and Firearms: A Cross-National Study of 171 Countries," University of Alabama's Adam Lankford, an associate professor of criminology, found a link between the number of guns and mass shootings that killed four or more people. The data set ranged from 1966 through 2012.

Since 1996, countries including Canada, Britain and Norway have tried out modified versions of Australia's measures, allowing owners of illegal weapons to hand them in without fear of legal repercussions.

In Norway, lawmakers' willingness to reduce the number of firearms in circulation can mainly be traced to the 2011 Utoya shooting, in which a right-wing gunman, Anders Behring Breivik, killed 77 people in one of Europe's most gruesome terrorist attacks. Most of the victims were children or teenagers. One of the weapons Breivik used was a semiautomatic rifle.

Since then, the Norwegian government has pondered the feasibility of a much broader ban of semiautomatic rifles than is in place elsewhere. A commission proposed such restrictions last fall, and lawmakers are now set to approve the measures.

In Australia and in Norway, two major shooting massacres appear to have changed the national debate over gun ownership, but both examples also show the limits of such approaches in the United States. Gun amnesties on illegal firearms naturally worked only if certain types of firearms were banned or their access was limited.

"Taking these unregistered firearms off the streets means they will not fall into the hands of criminals, who might use them to endanger the lives of innocent Australians," Law Enforcement Minister Angus Taylor said Thursday.

But based on numbers provided by Canadian authorities, amnesties mostly help to reduce the number of

illegal firearms accidentally inherited by daughters or sons of gun owners. Hence, such initiatives are ill-equipped to directly combat illegal weapons ownership among criminals or individuals willing to commit attacks.

To prevent massacres, amnesties tend to work only if deployed in tandem with the European-style measures deeply loathed by American conservatives: broad bans or restrictions on firearms ownership.

"In the United States, of course you have the gun lobby and the Second Amendment," said Anders Romarheim, associate professor at the Norwegian Institute for Defense Studies and an expert who advised the commission looking into the Utoya attack. "But in Norway, we don't really have anything similar to that. So, once the idea came up to restrict firearms access, it was a done deal."

NATIONAL NEWS

Trump's Tariff Headwind May Buffet Smooth-Sailing U.S. Economy

By Sho Chandra And Rich Miller

Bloomberg News, March 1, 2018

On a day when U.S. economic tailwinds were highlighted by the new Federal Reserve chairman and evident in several reports, President Donald Trump decided to add a headwind.

Trump said the U.S. will impose tariffs of 25 percent on imported steel and 10 percent on aluminum for "a long period of time." Stocks and Treasury yields tumbled on concern that the move could spark a trade war and hold back the economy, with shares of big exporters such as Boeing Co. and United Technologies Corp. among those hit hard.

"It's a really bad idea – how bad depends on what the rest of the world does in response," said Mark Zandi, chief economist at Moody's Analytics Inc. in West Chester, Pennsylvania.

Trump's announcement came after data released Thursday morning showed recent tax cuts buoyed Americans' spending power in January, unemployment claims fell last week to an almost five-decade low and factories expanded in February at the fastest rate since 2004. Over on Capitol Hill, Fed Chairman Jerome Powell reiterated to lawmakers that "some of the headwinds the U.S. economy faced in previous years have turned into tailwinds," including fiscal policy and demand for U.S. exports.

The tariffs could reduce U.S. growth by as much as 0.2 percentage point this year, and further risk lies in how trading partners respond, Barclays Plc economists said. While a tight job market and tax cuts are likely to keep America's expansion humming along, the trade tensions could weigh on growth and boost inflation more than desired by Fed policy makers.

Zandi said that while the tariffs alone may have only minimal effects on U.S. growth and inflation, "I can't imagine the rest of the world is going to stand still for very long. The scenarios you can construct can get pretty dark pretty quickly."

Imposing tariffs would open a new chapter in the long-running tension between Trump's growth-boosting policies – such as tax cuts and reduced regulation – and his trade and immigration proposals, which economists generally see as restricting growth. **Interest Rates**

Higher inflation resulting from tariffs and follow-up actions could also push central bankers to raise interest rates at a faster pace.

"Raising trade barriers would risk setting off a trade war, which could damage economic growth prospects around the world," New York Fed President William Dudley said in Brazil on Thursday. "If tariffs go up, it will, at the margin, tend to put more upward pressure on prices, and those upward pressure on prices will have to be considered by the monetary authority."

Trump's action is likely to be felt in certain industries. One official with an industry group said the steel tariffs would deal a major blow to U.S. factories, which are already struggling to meet demand amid rising supply costs, a shrinking pool of workers and transportation shortages.

"It's a mistake. It's a big, big mistake," Timothy Fiore, chairman of the Institute for Supply Management's factory survey committee, said by phone on Thursday. "It is going to add so much disruption and cost here. We don't make a lot of those steels anymore, so you're going to have to import them anyway."

Big sectors of the U.S. economy are major steel consumers, and the material is present in consumer goods from cars to appliances and lawn mowers, said Rufus Yerxa, president of the National Foreign Trade Council in Washington, a business group advocating open trade. **Growth Goal**

Most economists were already unconvinced that Trump will achieve his goal of sustained 3 percent growth, with the effects of tax cuts fading after an initial boost this year. Analysts surveyed by Bloomberg News see U.S. gross domestic product growing an average 2.7 percent in 2018, up from 2.3 percent last year, before slowing to 2.4 percent in 2019.

Trump's Tariffs Deal a Blow to Already-Shrinking U.S. Auto Sales

The tariffs could boost annual inflation rates by 0.1 percentage point, though "any pass-through to final goods prices is likely to be less than full and come with a lag," according to Barclays.

It's still possible that Trump could stop short of implementing the tariffs, or exempt certain steel products or countries from his new policy. After all, the president's \$1.5

trillion tax-cut legislation was aimed at bringing relief to consumers, whereas the import tariffs would end up as a penalty on Americans' purchases of foreign-made goods, with a full-blown trade war potentially boosting prices of everything from cars to clothing.

"You may think that it's protecting jobs in the U.S.," said Michael Gapen, chief U.S. economist at Barclays, who formerly worked at the Fed. "But if you do create mini trade wars and trade volumes suffer, you may, on net, lose more jobs than you think you've saved."

— With assistance by Katia Dmitrieva, and Andrew Mayeda

GOP Meltdown Over Trump Plan To Impose Steel, Aluminum Tariffs

NBC News, March 1, 2018

Republicans pounced on President Donald Trump's plan Thursday to slap tariffs of 25 percent on imported steel and 10 percent on imported aluminum, warning that it will lead to a trade war and leave American consumers paying the price.

"New, huge tariffs on all kinds of imported steel is a big mistake that will increase costs on American consumers, cost our country jobs, and invite retaliation from other countries," said Sen. Pat Toomey, R-Penn.

Republicans in Congress broke ranks with the president in an unprecedented way, with one after another coming forward during the day to caution about the dangers of tariffs and plead with Trump to hold off on any action.

Sen. Mike Lee, R-Utah, said Trump's tariffs would be a "huge job-killing tax hike" consumers.

"While I am sympathetic to the issues facing domestic steel manufacturers, there must be a better way to address the steel industries concerns, and I hope Congress and the executive branch can identify an alternative solution before these tariffs are finalized next week," Lee said in a statement.

Key players on Capitol Hill, including House Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis., and Senate Finance Committee Chairman Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, were not given any heads up about Trump's tariff announcement. Past practice has been that legislative leaders would be briefed ahead of such a major change of policy.

The prospects of a trade war also pushed the Dow down over 400 points at the close of trading.

Trump, who has made no secret of his desire to implement more protectionist trade policies, tweeted that steel and aluminum manufacturing in the U.S. had been "decimated by decades of unfair trade and bad policy."

"We're going to be instituting tariffs next week," Trump announced at a meeting of business leaders at the White House.

"People have no idea how badly our country has been treated by other countries," the president added, blaming past U.S. negotiators for not having a "clue" about trade.

A spokesman for Ryan said, "The speaker is hoping the president will consider the unintended consequences of this idea and look at other approaches before moving forward."

Shares in steel and aluminum companies took a wild ride Thursday, soaring on news that the highly anticipated tariff would be imposed, then tanking after indications that the White House meeting with industry executives might not include a discussion on tariffs, only to rise again once the president signaled his intent to impose them.

The administration's announcement came after reports of infighting between free trade and protectionist factions in the White House. Free trade supporters warned that imposing the tariffs could lead to trade wars that would negatively impact American industries ranging from agriculture to technology.

"My advice was...that you've gotta be careful here, you get into a tariff war," Sen. Roy Blunt, R-Mo., told reporters. "Sol would prefer that this was not where we were."

Experts who support free trade warned about the potential consequences.

"It will open a Pandora's box — protecting an industry based on national security concerns is a rarity," said Dan Ikenson, director of the Cato Institute's trade policy studies center.

Canada, a U.S. ally and large trading partner, said Thursday that it views "any trade restrictions on Canadian steel and aluminum as absolutely unacceptable."

"Any restrictions would harm workers, the industry and manufacturers on both sides of the border," said the Canadian minister of foreign affairs, Chrystia Freeland. "The Canadian government will continue to make this point directly with the American administration at all levels...Should restrictions be imposed on Canadian steel and aluminum products, Canada will take responsive measures to defend its trade interests and workers."

Robert Scott, senior economist at the left-leaning Economic Policy Institute, said tariffs that failed to distinguish between America's trade allies and countries like China, which the U.S. has accused of illegal trade practices, could make it more difficult to resolve trade disputes.

"The best of options is higher tariffs on steel from unfair traders and quotas on everyone else," Scott said. "The advantage to that approach is it would allow us to work with other countries to impose similar tariffs on these unfair traders."

Analysts on both the right and left also warned that the tariffs would have unintended consequences that could hurt the same industries that Trump said during the campaign he would protect.

"Immediately, the steel and aluminum using industries in the United States are going to see their costs of production go up, and they'll also have trouble competing with their foreign competition because foreign manufacturers will be able to charge lower prices," Ikenson said. "This is disconcerting because there's a lot at stake."

Hatch said, "I don't believe tariffs work very well and, secondly, it creates tariff wars."

GOP Reaction To Trump Tariffs Is Fast, Furious And Negative

By Joe Williams

Roll Call (DC), March 1, 2018

Senate Republicans are calling for changes to the seldom-employed section of U.S. trade law that the Trump administration used to unilaterally impose steep new tariffs on steel and aluminum imports.

The conversations are in the preliminary stages, but build upon discussions GOP members have had for weeks regarding concerns over the White House's trade policy.

President Donald Trump on Thursday announced that next week his administration would impose a new 10 percent tariff on aluminum imports and 25 percent tariff on steel imports. The move was met with a swift rebuke from congressional Republicans.

"Tariffs on steel and aluminum are a tax hike the American people don't need and can't afford. I encourage the president to carefully consider all of the implications of raising the cost of steel and aluminum on American manufacturers and consumers," Senate Finance Chairman Orrin G. Hatch said in a statement. The Utah Republican's committee oversees most trade matters.

Members said the chamber would in the coming weeks explore possible changes to the provision of the Trade Expansion Act of 1962 — known as Section 232 — that allows the president to impose unlimited tariffs if a federal investigation determines it poses a threat to national security.

"There are some that are proposing some action," Sen. Thom Tillis, R-N.C. said, who said members are specifically looking at possible revisions to Section 232. "We haven't gotten into the specifics."

Trump to Lawmakers: "I'll Love You" If Action is Taken on Gun Legislation

Senate Republicans have for weeks contemplated possible actions the chamber could take to push back against — or at least influence — actions the Trump administration has taken unilaterally on trade, including what oversight authority they have over the North American Free Trade Agreement should the White House opt to withdraw from the treaty.

"We are going to have some conversations about that, about what we can do to shape this," Senate Republican Conference Chair John Thune of South Dakota said. "I don't know what that would look like at the moment."

While not entirely surprised that Trump would announce new protective tariffs on the metals, several GOP senators indicated that they were not briefed ahead of the public announcement.

That includes Sen. Jerry Moran, a Kansas Republican concerned about the news both because of potential retaliation against his state's agriculture interests and because of the Kansas aviation manufacturing industry.

"I read in the press that this was coming, but I didn't have a briefing before the announcement," Moran said. "Information is helpful, and it's always one more opportunity to express concern about a direction that they appear to be going, so I would have been delighted to have been briefed on the decision."

Sen. John Hoeven of North Dakota echoed Moran's concerns about retaliation being taken against agricultural producers selling overseas.

"I talked with some of the guys that work more in the steel area, like I say I focus on the Ag side, and they're saying well they need some help, so I get that. I get that," Hoeven said. "At the same time, we want to be very careful to make sure that it doesn't hurt our ability to export in other areas."

Moran also said he had previously expressed concerns about trade policy undermining the benefits of the 2017 tax code re-write.

"I said this during the tax debate. I said it to my colleagues and said it to the administration, which is: I'm a supporter of the tax changes or tax reductions, but you will significantly damage or you'll significantly reduce the benefits that come from any tax bill if you undermine the ability to earn a living," Moran said. "Tax cuts only are helpful to people who are earning a living, who have income. And trade is how we gain income."

Sen. Roy Blunt, a Missouri Republican and member of leadership who often disagrees with Trump on trade, said he didn't necessarily think the steel determination was a sign of a broader protectionist move.

"We've had lots of discussions about trade, and I think generally he has been open to thinking about trade agreements," Blunt said. "The 232 defense determination is one that uniquely is left to the president."

Defying GOP, Trump To Impose Steep Tariffs On Steel, Aluminum Next Week

By Vicki Needham

The Hill, March 1, 2018

President Trump said Thursday that he will impose steep tariffs on steel and aluminum imports from around the

world next week, defying GOP lawmakers who have pushed back against the move.

Trump said he will announce tariffs of 25 percent on imported steel and 10 percent on aluminum from all countries that send their metals to the United States, a decision sure to lead to retaliation by trade partners.

"We'll be signing it next week. And you'll have protection for a long time in a while," Trump said, casting the effort as a way to protect U.S. producers during a meeting with 15 steel and aluminum industry executives.

"You'll have to regrow your industries, that's all I'm asking."

The decision is expected to bring a strong backlash from global trading partners as well as Republicans on Capitol Hill who have repeatedly urged the president to tread carefully on imposing tariffs that would raise prices for U.S. businesses and consumers.

"It would be very bad for consumers, it would raise costs for all kinds of products, it would destroy more jobs than it saves in steel, and it would invite retaliation from other countries," Sen. Pat Toomey (R-Pa) said Thursday.

Earlier in the week, Senate Finance Committee Chairman Orrin Hatch also criticized the idea of tariffs in remarks at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, noting they would be paid by U.S. importers.

"Tariffs are taxes paid by American businesses and American families, and new tariffs would jeopardize some of the opportunities we successfully created through tax reform," Hatch said.

Trump had wanted to make an announcement on Thursday but the administration delayed a decision.

Instead he held a listening session with steel and aluminum leaders.

Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross sent two sets of three recommendations to Trump last week saying that steel and aluminum imports are a threat to national security under a trade law called Section 232.

Trump Announces Steel And Aluminum Tariffs Thursday Over Objections From Advisers And Republicans

By David J. Lynch And Damian Paletta

Washington Post, February 28, 2018

President Trump on Thursday said he has decided to impose punishing tariffs on imported steel and aluminum in a major escalation of his trade offensive, disappointing Republican congressional leaders and inviting retaliation by U.S. trading partners.

Speaking at the White House, the president said he has decided on tariffs of 25 percent for foreign-made steel and 10 percent for aluminum.

"We'll be imposing tariffs on steel imports and tariffs on aluminum imports," the president said. "...You will have protection for the first time in a long while, and you're going to regrow your industries."

Investors appeared shaken by the news. The Dow Jones industrial average fell around 586 points, a loss of 2 percent, in early-afternoon trading before closing the day down 420 points.

The announcement capped an on-again, off-again episode, with the president initially expected to announce the trade action on Thursday morning only to cancel amid fierce pushback from opponents. Trump acted following a determination by the Commerce Department earlier this month that rising import volumes threatened U.S. national security.

The president's move, relying upon a little-used provision of U.S. trade law, is expected to trigger immediate legal challenges by U.S. trading partners at the World Trade Organization and invite retaliation against American exports.

Trump also turned back pleas from companies that are heavy users of steel and aluminum, including automakers, who warn that higher prices will hurt their sales and potentially lead to layoffs. In 2002, the last time the United States imposed steel tariffs, steel users blamed the measures for the loss of up to 200,000 jobs.

Sen. Roy Blunt (R-Mo.), a member of the Republican leadership, said before the announcement that he feared the tariffs will hurt companies in his home state.

"I continue to be concerned about what other countries do in response to that," Blunt said. "In our state, we make steel and aluminum, but we continue to buy a lot more than we make. Things like sheet aluminum that you use to make boats with, we make a lot of boats, it's not available in the United States."

The United States already has 169 trade taxes in place on various types of imported steel, including 29 on Chinese products. Some of the nation's largest steelmakers, which sought the new tariffs, also are in good shape financially. Nucor reported a \$1.1 billion profit last year.

"Import taxes on steel and aluminum will raise the prices of those products, which in turn will raise the price of doing business for U.S. manufacturers," said economist Christine McDaniel of George Mason University's Mercatus Center. "There are more people in U.S. manufacturing sectors that rely on steel than there are in the U.S. steel industry. In terms of the economics, the trade-off does not make sense."

In a further slap at China, Trump announced the tariffs even as a top Chinese economic official was in Washington for talks aimed at forestalling a possible trade war. Liu He, one of Chinese President Xi Jinping's closest aides, is scheduled to meet with senior administration officials in a bid to restart a direct economic dialogue that lagged last year.

The tariff episode came one day after the Trump administration warned that it would vigorously defend U.S. national interests against "hostile" powers such as China and Russia, vowing to use "all available tools" to combat unfair practices.

"Countries that refuse to give us reciprocal treatment or who engage in other unfair trading practices will find that we know how to defend our interests," said the annual report to Congress on the president's trade agenda.

On Thursday, China's Foreign Ministry repeated its government's objections. "The United States is disregarding the rules of the WTO, and China is dissatisfied with this," spokeswoman Hua Chunying told a regular news conference. She said such measures would affect employment in the United States and affect the interests of U.S. consumers. "As for the actions of the United States, China will take proper measures to safeguard its legitimate rights and interests."

Trump's desire for wholesale change in U.S. trade policy has met with increasing resistance from congressional Republicans as well as the business community, normally a reliable GOP ally.

Despite the president's claims of progress, he has little to show for some of his central promises after more than a year in the White House. Though he promised to narrow the yawning U.S. trade deficit, it reached \$566 billion last year, a 12.1 percent increase over 2016 and the highest mark in nine years.

The U.S. deficit with China last year hit a record \$375 billion, the Commerce Department said last month.

Erica Werner contributed to this report

Trump's Steel Tariff Rejected By GOP, Praised By Democrats

By Erik Wasson

Bloomberg News, March 1, 2018

President Donald Trump's closest Republican allies on Capitol Hill are criticizing his plan to impose tariffs on steel and aluminum imports to protect national security, while some Democrats are applauding.

The upside-down reaction comes a day after Trump irked Republicans and pleased many Democrats by backing stricter gun-control measures and suggesting the government could take guns, initially without due process, from some citizens viewed as dangerous.

House Speaker Paul Ryan's office said Trump should reconsider his plan for a 25 percent tariff on imported steel and 10 percent on aluminum, announced at the White House on Thursday.

"The speaker is hoping the president will consider the unintended consequences of this idea and look at other approaches before moving forward," said Doug Andres, a spokesman for Ryan of Wisconsin.

Senate Finance Committee Chairman Orrin Hatch, a Utah Republican whose committee oversees trade matters and who late last year suggested Trump could become the greatest U.S. president, called the move a burden on the public.

"Tariffs on steel and aluminum are a tax hike the American people don't need and can't afford," Hatch said. "I encourage the president to carefully consider all of the implications of raising the cost of steel and aluminum on American manufacturers and consumers." Tariffs 'Can Backfire'

House Ways and Means Chairman Kevin Brady of Texas urged Trump to narrow the focus of the tariffs.

"The president is right to target unfair trade, but blanket tariffs that sweep up fairly traded steel and aluminum can backfire and harm our businesses and workers," Brady said. "I urge President Trump to focus on targeting unfairly traded steel and aluminum while continuing to protect American companies that rely on fairly traded products."

Senator Ben Sasse, a Nebraska Republican, said the tariffs would be expected from a "leftist administration." He didn't mention that Republican President George W. Bush imposed steel tariffs.

Pennsylvania Republican Charlie Dent said he is worried that Hershey Co. in his state could be hurt by the move because it uses aluminum to package its candy.

The GOP criticism was in sharp contrast to the praise from trade skeptics in the Democratic Party.

"This welcome action is long overdue for shuttered steel plants across Ohio and steelworkers who live in fear that their jobs will be the next victims of Chinese cheating," said Ohio Democratic Senator Sherrod Brown.

Democratic Senator Ron Wyden of Oregon said, "The American steel industry has been under pressure for decades from unfairly traded products from China and elsewhere, as well as global overcapacity. I am pleased that the president recognizes the importance of addressing these challenges and finally intends to take action."

Dem Senator Facing Reelection Applauds Trump For New Tariffs

By Brett Samuels

[The Hill](#), March 1, 2018

Sen. Bob Casey Jr. (D-Pa.) on Thursday praised President Trump for announcing plans to impose steep tariffs on steel and aluminum imports, saying it will help Pennsylvania workers.

"It has taken the Administration far too long, but today's announcement of an intention to act next week is a welcome step," Casey tweeted.

"When countries cheat on trade, Pennsylvania workers lose. I urge the Administration to follow through and to take

aggressive measures to ensure our workers can compete on a level playing field," he continued.

I have repeatedly called on this and previous Administrations to aggressively enforce our trade laws. For years, foreign countries have been dumping steel into our markets and costing our workers their jobs and suppressing their wages.— Senator Bob Casey (@SenBobCasey) March 1, 2018

When countries cheat on trade, Pennsylvania workers lose. I urge the Administration to follow through and to take aggressive measures to ensure our workers can compete on a level playing field.— Senator Bob Casey (@SenBobCasey) March 1, 2018

Trump said earlier Thursday that he will announce next week tariffs of 25 percent on imported steel and 10 percent on aluminum. He framed the move as an effort to protect U.S. workers from foreign competition and to boost domestic production.

Casey is up for reelection in November in a state Trump narrowly won in 2016. The Cook Political Report, a nonpartisan election handicapper, rates his seat as likely to remain Democratic.

Casey was one of just a few lawmakers to praise Trump's decision, with Republicans largely criticizing the announcement.

Casey's fellow Pennsylvania senator Pat Toomey (R) said raising tariffs would be "very bad for consumers" and would "destroy more jobs than it saves in steel."

Sen. Ben Sasse (R-Neb.) ripped the announcement, saying Trump is essentially proposing "a massive tax increase on American families."

Trump Says U.S. To Impose Steep Tariffs On Steel, Aluminum Imports

By Steve Holland, Ginger Gibson

[Reuters](#), March 1, 2018

Full-text stories from Reuters currently cannot be included in this document. You may, however, click the link above to access the story.

Wall Street Drops More Than 1 Percent On Trump Tariff Comments

By Caroline Valetkevitch

[Reuters](#), March 1, 2018

Full-text stories from Reuters currently cannot be included in this document. You may, however, click the link above to access the story.

Stocks Drop With Gold Before Powell's Hearing: Markets Wrap

By Eddie Van Der Walt And Cormac Mullen

[Bloomberg News](#), February 28, 2018

European shares headed lower after sharp declines in the U.S. and Asia. Treasuries and the dollar steadied as traders awaited a second appearance from Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell, whose comments riled markets earlier this week.

Retailers and media companies were among the biggest losers in the Stocks Europe 600 Index. S&P 500 Index futures signaled the underlying gauge will open higher after its worst month in two years. Spot gold headed for the lowest close in almost two months on the expectation of higher interest rates, and West Texas Intermediate crude was set for the first advance in three days. The 10-year Treasury yield held below 2.9 percent and German bund yields were little changed.

Market participants will keep a close eye on Powell's second day of testimony after he painted an upbeat picture of the U.S. economy on Tuesday. His comments opened the door to speculation the central bank plans to quicken the pace of monetary tightening, a move investors like Bridgewater Associates Inc. President Ray Dalio warn could hamper growth.

Elsewhere, the U.K. pound was little changed after the European Union published a draft Brexit treaty, squaring off with Prime Minister Theresa May. The Australian dollar dropped after business investment unexpectedly fell in the final three months of last year.

Terminal users can read more in our markets blog.

Stocks Drop As Trump's Tariffs Rattle Markets

By Matt Phillips

[New York Times](#), March 1, 2018

President Trump's vow to impose tariffs on steel and aluminum next week rattled financial markets Thursday.

Stocks, which had already been down for the day, slipped further after the White House announced the planned tariffs. The Standard & Poor's 500-stock index fell 1.2 percent to 2,682 Thursday afternoon, after falling roughly 2 percent earlier in the day.

Shares of automakers such as Ford and General Motors, large consumers of steel and aluminum, fell sharply, as the tariffs would raise the cost of raw materials.

"Historically, the automakers have to absorb these costs," said Colin Langan, an analyst at UBS who covers automakers. "Consumers don't adjust their price expectations based on higher steel prices."

Shares of industrial companies also dropped, led by exporters such as Boeing and United Technologies.

On the other hand, some companies that sell industrial metals saw their stock prices rise, with shares of AK Steel up roughly 8 percent and U.S. Steel jumping more than 6 percent.

The prospect of a protectionist policy push forced investors Thursday to rethink whether that could derail a

global economy that has been growing across the board over the last year.

In fact, until Mr. Trump's comments on Thursday, the prevailing worry for investors seemed to be that economic growth — both in the United States and around the world — was so robust that the Federal Reserve might move quickly to raise interest rates in order to fend off inflation.

Those concerns led to a sharp sell-off in the stock market in early February, with the S.&P. at one point down more than 10 percent from its January peak.

Mr. Trump's comments seemed to overshadow those concerns, at least for the moment. The yield on the 10-year Treasury note — which moves in the opposite direction of its price — dropped sharply Thursday as investors scurried to the safety of American government bonds. After flirting with 3 percent in recent weeks, the yield was hovering near 2.80 percent Thursday afternoon.

U.S. Stocks Tumble After Trump Announces New Import Tariffs

Dow industrials drop more than 400 points and erase their gains for the year

By Michael Wursthorn

[Wall Street Journal](#), March 1, 2018

Full-text stories from the Wall Street Journal are available to Journal subscribers by clicking the link.

Automakers Among Sectors Reeling Over U.S. Steel, Aluminum Tariffs

By Nick Carey, Arunima Banerjee

[Reuters](#), March 1, 2018

Full-text stories from Reuters currently cannot be included in this document. You may, however, click the link above to access the story.

Trump Tariffs On Steel, Aluminum Could Hurt U.S. Industry; Trade War Fear Sinks Stocks

By Todd Spangler

[USA Today](#), March 1, 2018

President Donald Trump said Thursday he will impose heavy tariffs on imported steel and aluminum that could increase American jobs in those sectors but also raise prices.

The actions could hurt a number of industries including automakers and suppliers, boat and plane manufacturers and even beer companies.

There's also concern the move could trigger a "trade war" in which countries would retaliate by imposing tariffs, or other measures, in response to other country's actions.

Speaking to more than a dozen steel and aluminum executives at the White House, Trump said he would sign tariffs of 25% on imported steel and 10% on imported aluminum next week.

"It'll be for a long period of time," Trump said during the meeting with executives from U.S. Steel, AK Steel, Arcelor Mital, Nucor and other producers. "We'll be signing it in. And you'll have protection for the first time in a long while and you're going to regrow your industries. That's all I'm asking."

The president also said that dumping of cheap, imported steel and aluminum "destroys our companies and our jobs." He added to the executives, "People have no idea how badly our country has been treated. ... Of if they did, then they should be ashamed of themselves because they've destroyed the steel industry, they've destroyed the aluminum industry, and other industries, frankly."

Stocks fell rapidly after the announcement, with the Dow Jones industrial average plunging as much as 586 points in the session, though they regained some of that back later in the afternoon. The Dow lost 420 points, or nearly 1.7%, to close at 24608.98. The Standard & Poor's 500 index and Nasdaq each shed about 1.3%

"There's a quiet concern among investors about the potential of a trade war," says Jason Ware, chief investment officer and chief economist for Albion Financial Group. "Nobody knows what the real economic impact is and where it's going to end."

The move came even as some automakers, suppliers, business executives and members of Trump's own Republican Party pushed back on the idea of implementing tariffs amid worries they could raise prices or trigger a trade war, especially with China.

"The notion of a trade war is also scary because it could lead to higher costs, and thus be inflationary in a general sense. This very idea could be fanning the flames of fresh inflation anxiety that, in part, amplified recent volatility pushing down stock prices in February," Ware said.

The Washington Post reported that China's Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying on Thursday accused the U.S. of "disregarding the rules of the WTO (World Trade Organization)" and that "China will take proper measures to safeguard its legitimate rights and interests."

While Detroit's auto manufacturers have been cautious about criticizing the president, auto suppliers have said clearly that tariffs could severely damage their businesses, though depending on how the tariffs are implemented, there could be a process put in place through which they could seek exemptions from the duties.

Meanwhile, the Association of Global Automakers – a trade group of international automakers and suppliers doing business in the U.S. that includes Toyota, Honda and others – as recently as Wednesday urged against tariffs and quotas saying they could force auto prices and those of other consumer goods higher.

"With one stroke of the pen, much of the promised benefit of tax reform and other administration initiatives aimed at reviving manufacturing and protecting national security

could be undercut," said John Bozzella, Global Automakers' president and CEO, who cited an analysis of steel tariffs put in place in 2002 that he said cost some 200,000 jobs nationwide, including 30,000 in Michigan, Ohio and Pennsylvania.

"More expensive steel and aluminum will not simply raise the price of cars and trucks," he added. "It will increase the price of any and all goods that use (them) – Air Force planes, Navy ships, and Army vehicles."

It wasn't just automakers complaining: the National Marine Manufacturers Association also put out a statement Thursday saying the tariffs will drive up the cost of recreational boats and fishing vessels of all kinds. Beer maker MillerCoors tweeted late Thursday that it was "disappointed with President Trump's announcement of a 10% tariff on aluminum."

Still, the prospect of tariffs was cheered by steel and aluminum makers in the U.S. who say their businesses have been decimated and thousands of jobs lost due to other nations dumping cheap, imported products in the country.

In the meeting with Trump, David Burritt, president and CEO of U.S. Steel, said, "We are not protectionists. We want a level playing field. ... And when we get this right, it will be great for the United States of America."

It was not immediately clear what imports would be subject to the tariffs and how long they might last. Two weeks ago, the Commerce Department released reports recommending the high tariffs on imported steel and aluminum — especially from China, South Korea and elsewhere — saying dumping of cheap product threatened to impair national security. But those reports gave the president wide latitude to set or reject tariffs.

The reports found that U.S. steel employment had dropped by 35% since 2000 and recommended a global tariff of at least 24% on all steel imports or, alternatively, a tariff of at least 53% on steel imports from China, South Korea, Russia and nine other countries, with a quota on all imported steel equal to last year's levels.

On aluminum, the reports noted industry employment fell by 58% between 2013 and 2016 and recommended either a tariff of at least 7.7% tariff on all aluminum imports; a tariff of 23.6% on products from China, Hong Kong, Russia, Venezuela and Vietnam with a quota equal to last year's imports, or a quota on all imports from all countries equal to a maximum of 86.7% of their 2017 levels.

The American Automotive Policy Council, a trade group that represents General Motors, Ford and Fiat Chrysler, warned the Commerce Department last May that any restriction of steel imports could potentially have unintended consequences and increase the cost of steel in the U.S. while lowering it to overseas competitors.

"This would lead to lower sales of domestically built cars and trucks in the highly competitive U.S. auto market, a

decrease in U.S. auto exports, and a loss of the jobs that those economic activities support. In the end, that would be a net-negative for the U.S. economy, and potentially the U.S. steel industry – the very sector such restrictions were designed to assist,” the report said.

The Business Roundtable group of CEOs and others, including many Republicans in Congress, have also argued that tariffs could hurt business and drive up prices, even as domestic steel and aluminum makers complained their businesses cannot thrive under the current rules.

Trade War? Trump Orders Big Tariffs On Steel, Aluminum

By Ken Thomas And Paul Wiseman

Associated Press, March 1, 2018

WASHINGTON (AP) — Ordering combative action on foreign trade, President Donald Trump declared Thursday the U.S. will impose steep tariffs on steel and aluminum imports, escalating tensions with China and other trading partners and raising the prospect of higher prices for American consumers and companies.

With “trade war” talk in the air, stocks closed sharply lower on Wall Street.

Trump said firm action was crucial to protect U.S. industry from unfair competition and to bolster national security. However, his announcement came only after an intense internal White House debate. It brought harsh criticism from some Republicans and roiled financial markets with concerns about economic ramifications.

Overseas, Trump’s words brought a stinging rebuke from the president of the European Commission. Though the president generally focuses on China in his trade complaining, it was the EU’s Jean-Claude Juncker who denounced his plan as “a blatant intervention to protect U.S. domestic industry.”

Juncker said the EU would take retaliatory action if Trump followed through.

President Donald Trump has told U.S. aluminum and steel executives that he’ll impose import tariffs ‘next week’ in a bid to boost American manufacturing. (March 1)

Trump, who has long railed against what he deems unfair trade practices by China and others, summoned steel and aluminum executives to the White House and said next week he would levy penalties of 25 percent on imported steel and 10 percent on aluminum imports. The tariffs, he said, would remain for “a long period of time,” but it was not immediately clear if certain trading partners would be exempt.

“What’s been allowed to go on for decades is disgraceful. It’s disgraceful,” Trump told the executives in the Cabinet Room. “When it comes to a time when our country can’t make aluminum and steel ... you almost don’t have much of a country.”

The president added: “You will have protection for the first time in a long while, and you’re going to regrow your industries. That’s all I’m asking. You have to regrow your industries.”

Increased foreign production, especially by China, has driven down prices and hurt U.S. producers, creating a situation the Commerce Department has called a national security threat.

However, critics raised the specter of a trade war, suggesting other countries will retaliate or use national security as a reason to impose trade penalties of their own.

Trump’s move will likely raise steel and aluminum prices here. That’s good for U.S. manufacturers. But it’s bad for companies that use the metals, and it prompted red flags from industries ranging from tool and dye makers to beer distributors to manufacturers of air conditioners. The American International Automobile Dealers Association warned it would drive prices up “substantially.”

“This is going to have fallout on our downstream suppliers, particularly in the automotive, machinery and aircraft sectors,” said Wendy Cutler, a former U.S. trade official who is now vice president of the Asia Society Policy Institute. “What benefits one industry can hurt another. What saves one job can jeopardize another.”

Steel-consuming companies said steel tariffs imposed in 2002 by President George W. Bush ended up wiping out 200,000 U.S. jobs.

The decision had been strenuously debated within the White House, with top officials such as economic adviser Gary Cohn and Defense Secretary Jim Mattis raising concerns.

The penalties were pushed by Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross and White House trade adviser Peter Navarro, an economist who has favored taking aggressive action.

Mattis, in a memo to Commerce, said U.S. military requirements for steel and aluminum represent about 3 percent of U.S. production and that the department was “concerned about the negative impact on our key allies” of any tariffs. He added that targeted tariffs would be preferable to global quotas or tariffs.

Plans for Trump to make an announcement were thrown into doubt for a time because of the internal divisions. The actual event caught some top White House officials off guard and left aides scrambling for details. Key Senate offices also did not receive advance notice.

White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders said the decision “shouldn’t come as a surprise to anyone,” noting that the president had been talking about it “for decades.”

But some Republicans in Congress were plainly upset.

“The president is proposing a massive tax increase on American families. Protectionism is weak, not strong,” said Sen. Ben Sasse of Nebraska. “You’d expect a policy this bad

from a leftist administration, not a supposedly Republican one."

GOP Sen. Pat Roberts of Kansas, chairman of the Senate Agriculture Committee, said "every time you do this, you get a retaliation and agriculture is the No. 1 target."

Trump met with more than a dozen executives, including representatives from U.S. Steel Corp., Arcelor Mittal, Nucor, JW Aluminum and Century Aluminum. The industry leaders urged Trump to act, saying they had been unfairly hurt by a glut of imports.

"We are not protectionist. We want a level playing field," said Dave Burritt, president and chief executive officer at U.S. Steel.

Trump last year ordered an investigation into whether aluminum and steel imports posed a threat to national defense. Ross said last month that the imports "threaten to impair our national security," noting, for example, that only one U.S. company now produces a high-quality aluminum alloy needed for military aircraft.

Under section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act of 1962, the president has the authority to restrict imports and impose unlimited tariffs if a Commerce Department investigation finds a national security threat.

Commerce recommended a number of options. The president's plan is more stringent than any of them.

It was the latest move by the president to engage in trade actions after campaigning to revitalize the "forgotten" workers of the country. Trump earlier raised duties on Chinese-made washing machines, solar modules and some aluminum and steel products to offset what he said were improper subsidies.

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Donald Trump Meets With Business Executives: Promises Steel And Aluminum Tariffs Next Week

By Charlie Spiering

Breitbart, March 1, 2018

President Donald Trump met about a dozen business executives in steel and aluminum, promising to enact tariffs of 25 percent for steel and 10 percent for aluminum in response to cheap foreign imports.

"People have no idea how badly our country has been treated by other countries by people representing us that didn't have a clue or if they did, then they should be ashamed of themselves," Trump said. "Because they have destroyed the steel industry."

Trump touted his new tariffs as a way to restore the greatness of the steel and aluminum industries in the United States.

"We're bringing it all back," he said, promising that the tariffs would be signed next week.

Once completed, the enactment of tariffs will signal the first major victory for his fair trade agenda, which has been largely strangled by opposing forces in the White House.

Several White House officials tried to enact a frantic, last-ditch effort to stop Trump's decision on Thursday, leaking details of dysfunction and division in the White House to the media.

But Trump told reporters that he had made his decision.

The president said he understood why countries like China were dumping cheap steel on the United States, but said that it had to stop. He had strong words for trade agreements like NAFTA and the WTO.

"The NAFTA deal was a disaster for our country, the WTO has been a disaster for this country," he said.

Trump said that the China's rise was directly a result of the World Trade Organization.

"It has been great for China and terrible for the United States," he said.

Many of the executives told Trump that they needed a "level playing field" in order to compete with steel and aluminum production in the United States.

"We call it the whack-a-mole game, it's time for whack-a-mole to end," Dave Burritt, the CEO of the U.S. Steel Corporation said at the meeting.

Trump said that his decision was partially based on the interests of national security.

"When our country can't make aluminum and steel ... you almost don't have much of a country, because without steel and aluminum the country is not the same," Trump said. "We need it."

Trump Plan To Impose Tariffs On Steel, Aluminum Raises Trade War Fears : The Two-Way

By John Ydstie, Avie Schneider

NPR, March 1, 2018

President Trump promised steel and aluminum executives Thursday that he will levy tariffs on imports of their products in coming weeks. He said the imported steel will face tariffs of 25 percent, while aluminum will face tariffs of 10 percent.

"We're going to build our steel industry back and we're going to build our aluminum industry back," Trump told reporters.

The president announced the action after meeting with leaders of the two industries at the White House. On Thursday afternoon, major stock market indexes fell sharply after Trump's announcement, with the Dow Jones industrial average closing down 420 points, or about 1.7 percent.

The decision follows a study by the Commerce Department that found that large amounts of steel and aluminum imports posed a threat to U.S. national security. That finding gives the White House the authority to limit imports by tariffs or other means.

Earlier Thursday, Trump tweeted: "Our Steel and Aluminum industries (and many others) have been decimated by decades of unfair trade and bad policy with countries from around the world. We must not let our country, companies and workers be taken advantage of any longer. We want free, fair and SMART TRADE!"

U.S. Steel CEO David Burritt, one of the industry executives who met with Trump, said, "We are not protectionists. We want a level playing field. It's for our employees; to support our customers. And when we get this right, it will be great for the United States of America."

John Lapides, president of United Aluminum Corp., said unfair competition has hurt investment in his business "and that lack of investment is reflected in a loss of jobs in America. ... And we need a level playing field, or we're going to lose our manufacturing infrastructure and the national security issues that surround having a vibrant, capable manufacturing sector."

Chad Bown, an economist and trade specialist, says the tariffs will drive up the price of steel and aluminum for the multiple other industries that use the metals. Those industries actually employ more people than the steel and aluminum sectors, he says, "so this is a really big concern, just from an economic perspective."

The tariffs are a response to the overproduction of steel and aluminum by China. But since there are already import restrictions on those Chinese products, new barriers are likely to have an impact on European allies, as well as Canada and Mexico, which could trigger retaliation.

As NPR's Scott Horsley reported, the Commerce Department argues that growing imports of steel and aluminum, driven in part by overproduction in China, have so weakened America's producers that a future military mobilization could be at risk.

Canada is the largest supplier of both products to the U.S. It's responsible for more than half of U.S. aluminum imports and about 17 percent of steel imports. Given the national security basis for the tariffs, it's ironic that under U.S. law, Canada is actually considered a part of the U.S. defense industrial base.

Canada's trade minister called the U.S. tariffs, which will take effect in two weeks, unacceptable. China has threatened to retaliate by curbing imports of U.S. soybeans. The European Union says it is considering action as well.

Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross recommended a tariff of at least 24 percent on steel imported from any country and a tariff of at least 7.7 percent on aluminum imported from any country. Ross offered another set of options that would

have set a tariff of at least 53 percent on steel from 12 countries including Brazil, China and Russia and a tariff of at least 23.6 percent on aluminum from China, Hong Kong, Russia, Venezuela and Vietnam.

Trump Announces New Tariffs On Aluminum And Steel

By Christian Datoc

Daily Caller, March 1, 2018

President Donald Trump announced Thursday a host of new "punitive" tariffs that will be implemented as soon as Monday.

President Donald Trump listens during a meeting with bipartisan members of the Congress at the Cabinet Room of the White House February 28, 2018 in Washington, D.C. (Photo by Alex Wong/Getty Images)

Trump made the announcement during a meeting with industry executives at the White House, arguing that domestic producers have been treated very unfairly by previous administrations.

"What's been allowed to go on for decades is disgraceful," he said at the meeting. "And when it comes to a time when our country can't make aluminum and steel, and somebody said it before and I will tell you, you almost don't have much of a country. Because without steel and aluminum, your country is not the same. We need it. We need it even for defense, if you think, we need it for defense."

"We need great steel makers. Great aluminum makers for defense. So, we will probably see you some time next week. We will be signing it in. You have protection for the first time in a long while and you are going to regrow your industries. That's all I'm asking. You have to regrow your industries."

WATCH:

The rates for aluminum will be 10 percent, while steel will be affected at a rate of 25 percent, and have "no endpoint," according to Fox News' John Roberts.

The president hinted at his reasoning for the tariffs in a tweet earlier Thursday morning.

"Our Steel and Aluminum industries (and many others) have been decimated by decades of unfair trade and bad policy with countries from around the world," he wrote. "We must not let our country, companies and workers be taken advantage of any longer. We want free, fair and SMART TRADE!"

The markets took a sharp dive just after Trump's announcement.

The Dow Jones Industrial average fell over 300 points following the announcement, a more than 1 percent drop.

The S&P 500 and NASDAQ both also fell nearly 1 percent.

This is a developing piece. More information will be added as it comes available.

Donald Trump To Slap Tariffs On Steel, Aluminum

By Dave Boyer, S.A. Miller

Washington Times, March 1, 2018

President Trump said Thursday that he plans to slap tariffs on steel and aluminum, bucking senior trade advisers and some industry leaders who warn Americans will pay the price.

The president insisted that tariffs were needed to combat dumping of foreign steel and aluminum into the U.S. market.

"It destroys our companies and our jobs," he said at a meeting with business leaders. "People have no idea how badly our country has been mistreated. ... We're bringing it all back."

Mr. Trump said he had decided on tariffs of 25 percent on steel and 10 percent on aluminum. He said he would sign the tariff order next week.

Mr. Trump was expected to act Thursday on Commerce Department recommendations to impose tariffs on steel and aluminum. However, the announcement was postponed after pushback from top trade advisers, according to multiple reports.

A steadfast supporter of the tariffs is Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross, who organized the meeting with steel and aluminum industry executives.

Critics have warned that he would be tempting a trade war, but Mr. Trump insists that he is reversing decades of unilateral surrender to foreign competitors.

Others warned that tariffs would drive up the cost of products that rely on inputs of steel and aluminum, including infrastructure sectors like transportation, manufacturing, agriculture and energy.

"Let's be clear: The President is proposing a massive tax increase on American families," said Sen. Ben Sasse, Nebraska Republican. "Protectionism is weak, not strong. You'd expect a policy this bad from a leftist administration, not a supposedly Republican one."

"These could be a lethal blow to all the economic success this administration has ushered in. Higher costs to producers and distributors of goods always get passed on to us, the consumers," said Adam Brandon, president of FreedomWorks, a conservative activity group.

At the meeting, U.S. Steel Corp. CEO Dave Burritt said competing with foreign companies that use unfair trade practices was like playing "the whack-a-mole game."

"We are not protectionists. We want a level playing field," he said.

John Ferriola, CEO of steel producer Nucor Corp., told reporters after the meeting that he thought the president was still finalizing the details but was confident of a "good conclusion."

"This is all about two things: national security and creating jobs for American workers," Mr. Ferriola said.

He pushed back when a reporter asked if the president was under pressure not to impose tariffs.

"I believe that he feels some pressure from the voters who elected him in the last election, when he promised to bring jobs back to America by protecting trade laws and defending our trade laws," he said.

The Commerce Department last month recommended tariffs on all imports of steel and aluminum. The recommendation followed a 10-month investigation that determined imports "threaten to impair the national security."

The report found that U.S. reliance on foreign-produced steel and aluminum, which is often government-subsidized, could compromise national security because those products have crucial military uses.

The report called for a 24 percent tariff on steel exported from all countries and higher tariffs on exports from 12 targeted countries: Brazil, China, Costa Rica, Egypt, India, Malaysia, Republic of Korea, Russia, South Africa, Thailand, Turkey and Vietnam.

For aluminum, the report recommended a 7.7 percent tariff on exports from all countries and a 23.6 percent tariff on products from China, Hong Kong, Russia, Venezuela and Vietnam.

The president is required to make a decision on the steel recommendations by April 11 and on the aluminum recommendations by April 19.

Earlier, Mr. Trump tweeted about his desire to fight back against unfair trade in steel and aluminum.

"Our Steel and Aluminum industries (and many others) have been decimated by decades of unfair trade and bad policy with countries from around the world," he wrote. "We must not let our country, companies and workers be taken advantage of any longer. We want free, fair and SMART TRADE!"

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Trump To Impose Stiff Tariffs On Steel And Aluminum

By Ana Swanson

New York Times, March 1, 2018

WASHINGTON — President Trump said on Thursday that he will impose stiff and sweeping tariffs on imports of steel and aluminum as he moved to fulfill a key campaign promise to get tough on foreign competitors.

Mr. Trump said he would formally sign the trade measures next week and promised they would be in effect "for a long period of time." The trade measures would impose tariffs of 25 percent on steel and 10 percent on aluminum. It is unclear whether those would apply to all imports or be targeted toward specific countries, like China, which have been flooding the United States with cheap metals.

The announcement capped a frenetic and chaotic morning inside the White House as Mr. Trump summoned more than a dozen executives from the steel and aluminum industry to the White House, raising expectations that he would announce his long-promised tariffs. However, the legal review of the trade measure was not yet complete and, as of Thursday morning, White House advisers were still discussing various scenarios for tariff levels and which countries could be included, according to people familiar with the deliberations.

Advisers have been bitterly divided over how to proceed on the tariffs, including whether to impose them broadly on all steel and aluminum imports or whether to tailor them more narrowly to target specific countries like China. Imposing tough sanctions would fulfill one of the president's key campaign promises but could tip off trade wars around the globe as other countries seek to retaliate against the United States.

Gary D. Cohn, the director of the National Economic Council, had been lobbying for months alongside others, including Defense Secretary James Mattis and Rob Porter, the staff secretary who recently resigned under pressure from the White House, to kill, postpone, or at least narrow the scope of the measures, people familiar with the discussions said.

But in recent weeks, a group of White House advisers who advocate a tougher posture on trade has been in ascendance, including Robert Lighthizer, the country's top trade negotiator, and Peter Navarro, a trade skeptic who had been sidelined but is now in line for a promotion.

The departure of Mr. Porter, who organized weekly trade meetings and coordinated the trade advisers, and the breakdown of the typical trade advisory process has helped create a chaotic situation in which those opposing factions are no longer kept in check. The situation had descended into utter chaos and an all-out war between various trade factions, people close to the White House said.

"Our Steel and Aluminum industries (and many others) have been decimated by decades of unfair trade and bad policy with countries from around the world," Mr. Trump said on Twitter Thursday morning. "We must not let our country,

companies and workers be taken advantage of any longer. We want free, fair and SMART TRADE!"

The White House has come to the brink of announcing these measures several times in the past eight months, including last June. In recent days, the president appears to have grown impatient for action. In the past few days, supporters of the tariffs have also begun airing televised ads during programs that Mr. Trump has been known to watch.

But foreign governments, multinational companies and the Pentagon have continued to lobby against the measure, arguing that the proposed tariffs could disrupt economic and security ties.

Mr. Trump's announcement came on the same day that senior administration officials are scheduled to meet with China's top economic adviser, Liu He. The White House has been eager to clamp down on Chinese imports and has several trade measures underway.

The investigation, which was launched under an obscure measure of the trade law called Section 232, has focused on whether imports were compromising American national security by degrading the industrial base. In a report released to the public in February, the Commerce Department concluded that imports were a national security threat.

The Trump administration has already issued tariffs — it imposed restrictions on foreign washing machines and solar panels in January — but trade analysts said the announcement on steel and aluminum could be the broadest and most significant measure yet from an administration that has vowed to take a substantially different tack on trade.

Trump Decides On Steep Tariffs On Steel And Aluminum Imports

A White House official said an announcement was not planned, but Treasury Department officials had been bracing for its effect on markets.

By Andrew Restuccia And Adam Behsudi
Politico, February 28, 2018

President Donald Trump on Thursday ignited a possible trade war by announcing a decision to impose tariffs of 25 percent on steel imports and 10 percent on aluminum to protect both industries from unfairly traded imports that the Commerce Department has determined pose a threat to national security.

"It'll be 25 percent for steel. It will be 10 percent for aluminum. It'll be for a long period of time," Trump said at a listening session with steel and aluminum industry executives at the White House. "We'll be signing it next week. And you'll have protection."

The announcement, which is likely to be met with outrage and retaliation from countries around the world, followed a fierce debate within the administration about

whether to make an announcement Thursday, according to people briefed on the matter. New tariffs on steel and aluminum imports could lead to a tit-for-tat trade fight with China, the European Union and other major world trade powers.

The internal debate made for a hectic morning at the White House, as administration officials were trying to figure out what exactly Trump was planning to say at the meeting — and some in the West Wing were strongly encouraging the president not to announce the planned tariffs.

Senior Treasury Department officials on Thursday morning were prepared for Trump to announce major tariffs and were deeply worried about market reaction.

Trump and Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross were joined at the listening session by chief of staff John Kelly; Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin; U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer; National Economic Council Director Gary Cohn; White House adviser Jared Kushner; Deputy White House Staff Secretary Derek Lyons; White House trade adviser Peter Navarro; White House counsel Don McGahn; and domestic policy adviser Stephen Miller.

Cohn has been arguing vociferously behind the scenes against the tariffs. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, national security adviser H.R. McMaster and Defense Secretary Jim Mattis have all also raised concerns about the planned actions, arguing that they could damage the United States' relationship with crucial allies.

But Trump has long been dead-set on imposing tariffs, and he has the support of the trade hawks in his administration, including Navarro, Lighthizer and Ross. The debate within the administration has raged for months and pitted Trump's top aides against one another.

Trump's final decision marks the culmination of a nearly 11-month investigation into whether imports of steel and aluminum posed a threat to U.S. national security.

Shortly before he resigned amid domestic abuse allegations, White House staff secretary Rob Porter got into a heated argument about the tariffs with Navarro in the Oval Office in front of the president, according to a person familiar with the issue.

Cohn and Porter had worked together for months to try to postpone, kill or narrow the scope of the tariffs. Porter organized weekly trade meetings at the White House to discuss the tariffs and other main issues in a bid to give the debate a more formal structure.

But Porter's resignation removed a fierce opponent of the tariffs from the West Wing and revived the chaotic policy review process that defined the early weeks of Trump's presidency.

Foreign trading partners have already promised swift retribution if they are caught in any major tariff action.

EU trade chief Cecilia Malmström warned earlier this week that the 28-nation trading bloc, a major producer of

steel, was discussing different options. "If he hits hard, we will have to take countermeasures," the commissioner said after arriving at a meeting of EU trade ministers this week.

Trump ordered the Commerce Department to initiate investigations last April examining whether the imports posed a threat to national security. The probes were invoked under the rarely used Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act of 1962.

Commerce released the findings of those investigations and its recommendations earlier in February, finding that imports of the metals did endanger national security.

Ross made three recommendations for both steel and aluminum imports. However, Trump could ignore that advice and choose his own options.

For steel, the first option is the 24 percent tariff on all imports. The second would exclude most NATO allies, while imposing a tariff of 53 percent on imports from a group of 12 countries: Brazil, China, Costa Rica, Egypt, India, Malaysia, Russia, South Africa, South Korea, Thailand, Turkey and Vietnam. In addition, future imports from those countries would be limited to the amount they exported to the United States in 2017.

The third steel option would not impose any tariffs, but would limit shipments from around the world to 63 percent of each country's 2017 exports to the United States.

The three recommended options for curbing aluminum imports follow a similar pattern: a 7.7 percent tariff on aluminum exports from all countries; a 23.7 percent tariff on all aluminum products from China, Russia, Venezuela and Vietnam as well as a quota at 100 percent of their 2017 shipment levels; or a universal quota that would cap imports from all countries at 86.7 percent of their 2017 exports to the U.S.

Mattis weighed in later with his own memo, where he agreed with the findings of the investigations. But the Defense chief cautioned against taking action that could alienate allies.

"DoD continues to be concerned about the negative impact on our key allies regarding the recommended options within the report," Mattis said in the memo.

Mattis also argued that the Defense Department did not believe it was at risk of not being able to get enough steel or aluminum for defense purposes, because the U.S. military's demand for those products is only about 3 percent of U.S. production.

In his memo, Mattis stated a preference for "targeted tariffs" that would focus on certain countries, rather than a global tariff or quota. He also urged the administration to make clear to domestic steel companies and labor leaders that "these tariffs and quotas are conditional," and suggest to them that some action is needed on their part to respond to foreign competition.

Chinese President Xi Jinping's top economic adviser Liu He is expected at the White House on Thursday for a separate meeting with Cohn, Lighthizer and Mnuchin. China has said it would act to protect its economic interests if hit by steel and aluminum tariffs, although U.S. anti-dumping and countervailing duties on its steel exports have already significantly reduced its shipments to the United States.

Doug Palmer, Ben White and Lorraine Woellert contributed to this report.

Trump's Tariff War Nudges Cohn Toward White House Exit

The president's top economic adviser lost a battle to prevent the imposition of steep tariffs pushed by protectionist advisers.

By Ben White And Andrew Restuccia

Politico, March 1, 2018

Gary Cohn, President Donald Trump's top economic adviser, has been rumored to be on the brink of leaving the White House for months but stayed for one main reason: to stop the president from imposing steep tariffs.

By Thursday afternoon, Cohn had lost the fight.

In a meeting with steel industry executives, Trump announced plans for a 25 percent tariff on steel imports and a 10 percent tariff on aluminum imports.

The decision came after a frantic 24 hours in which Cohn and others tried to walk Trump off the ledge. At one point, aides were sure Trump would make the announcement. Then they said he wouldn't. Finally, sitting alongside steel executives, he did.

The Dow promptly tanked over 500 points, and Cohn's allies began wondering if this would be the final insult sending the director of the National Economic Council to the exit.

One person close to Cohn, a former Goldman Sachs executive, said he wouldn't be surprised if he eventually left the chaotic and deeply exhausting administration as a result of the decision. A second person close to Cohn described it as a brutal blow that violated one of the NEC director's core beliefs—that protectionism is economically backward and won't lead to increased prosperity.

"It's just something he feels very passionate about and he is incredibly good at making the case," this person said, adding that it still isn't clear if Trump's decision would be enough to drive out Cohn.

Cohn nearly quit last summer following the president's comments about a white supremacist march in Charlottesville, Virginia. After drafting several resignation letters in the wake of the march, Cohn decided he would stay to help drive through the big tax cut bill that passed last year. He endured his time in the presidential doghouse after penning an op-ed critical of Trump.

Cohn did not respond to multiple requests for comment for this story.

Eight administration officials and outside advisers close to the matter described the tariff decision-making process. They declined to be named because they were not authorized to speak publicly about the issue. A White House spokesman did not respond to a request for comment.

Larry Kudlow, an outside Trump adviser often mentioned as a potential successor as NEC director, said he would not be surprised if Cohn felt burned by the steel decision. And he sharply criticized the president for Thursday's announcement.

"All that will happen with steel tariffs is you will raise prices for all import users and that includes businesses and of course consumers," Kudlow said. "You will wind up hurting millions of people to help 140,000 people in the steel industry. You will be hurting car buyers. Is that really what you want to do?"

While Cohn isn't expected to depart immediately, any decision to step down would greatly diminish the influence of the remaining moderates in the White House — and it would further isolate the New York delegation in the West Wing, including Jared Kushner and Ivanka Trump.

Cohn, a Democrat, has weathered constant criticism from Trump's conservative allies. Every time he's mentioned as a potential chief of staff, conservatives inside the White House and on Capitol Hill move to try to block such a move.

Now the question is much less whether he could be chief of staff but rather whether Cohn will stay at all.

The tariff decision on Thursday capped several weeks of freewheeling and often caustic debates that one White House aid called "absolute chaos" and featured loud disputes between Cohn and White House trade adviser Peter Navarro, a leading advocate of tariffs.

On Wednesday night, Cohn and his allies scrambled to forestall the announcement. They had long hoped Trump would take the full 60 days allowed under the law to make a decision, a time period that would give them more opportunity to make their case to the president about the economic and diplomatic consequences of the decision.

Cohn had been working closely with former staff secretary Rob Porter to postpone, kill or narrow the scope of the tariffs. But Porter's departure last month amid domestic abuse allegations further complicated their efforts.

Porter had been organizing weekly trade meetings in which senior officials and Cabinet secretaries debated the merits of the proposals. Without Porter to organize the administration's policy debate, Trump's advisers reverted back to the chaos of the early days of the administration, where aides fell all over each other to influence the president in any way they could.

Up until the moment Trump made the announcement on Thursday, senior White House aides were unsure how the

meeting would unfold. Asked Thursday morning what Trump was planning, a person closely involved in the administration's trade talks said, "Who the hell knows."

Multiple administration officials told POLITICO that Trump was unable to sign documents imposing the tariffs on Thursday because key paperwork had not yet been completed. "The legal work isn't done," one administration official said Wednesday night, expressing shock that Trump would make an announcement so quickly.

White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders said Thursday that more details on the tariffs — including possible exemptions — would come next week. An industry official said there would not be any tariff exclusions for countries or products except for imports required for military equipment needs, though Trump could still change his mind on the issue if he faces prolonged criticism in the coming days.

Cohn has long been suspicious of Navarro, the most vocal trade hawk in the administration.

Navarro, along with Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross and U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer, have been encouraging the president to take aggressive action on trade since the beginning of the administration. And Cohn has come to believe that the men were regularly making their case directly to the president in a bid to short circuit a broader debate among all of Trump's advisers, according to a person who has spoken to him.

Cohn's skepticism of the tariffs was echoed by most of the members of Trump's national security team, including national security adviser H.R. McMaster, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Defense Secretary Jim Mattis.

But Cohn's last-ditch efforts to sway Trump had little effect. People familiar with the issue said the president was dead-set on imposing tariffs and had already made up his mind to move forward, especially in the aftermath of a barrage of negative news about his staff that infuriated Trump.

Adam Behsudi contributed to this report.

Trump's Tariff Folly

His tax on aluminum and steel will hurt the economy and his voters.

Wall Street Journal, March 1, 2018

Full-text stories from the Wall Street Journal are available to Journal subscribers by clicking the link.

Trump's Tariffs Will Hurt All Americans

Washington Post, March 1, 2018

PRESIDENT TRUMP announced new tariffs on steel and aluminum imports Thursday, following the recent recommendations of his secretary of commerce, Wilbur Ross. Actually, Mr. Trump went a bit further, saying he would hit steel with a 25 percent levy, rounded up from the 24 percent

Mr. Ross had said was necessary to keep the U.S. industry operating at the 80 percent of capacity that central planners in his department deem optimal. For aluminum, the charge will be 10 percent. Prices on everything made from steel and aluminum will go up; jobs saved by producers may be offset by jobs lost elsewhere. If that seems contradictory, consider the fact that this tax increase on raw materials comes from the same president who says the economy is booming because he cut taxes on income.

Ostensibly, these added burdens on all Americans except those involved in steel and aluminum production are necessary for national security. That's the rationale Mr. Ross invoked to escape what would otherwise be American commitments under international trade law. Superficially plausible — planes are made of aluminum; tanks from steel — it's basically bogus. A real expert on national security, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, has been decidedly cool on Mr. Ross's protectionist project and said so in a memorandum to the commerce secretary, albeit between the lines. While Mr. Mattis said he was against countries "intentionally" using "unfair" trade practices to harm the U.S. defense industrial base — as opposed to outcompeting us, which is what some of the trading partners potentially affected by the Trump tariffs are actually doing — he also pointed out that U.S. industry can easily meet the military's steel and aluminum needs without protection.

If we must go ahead with tariffs anyway, Mr. Mattis urged, we should spare our "key allies" from "negative impact" and encourage them to join us in putting pressure on China, whose market manipulations in both steel and aluminum are real and a legitimate focus for U.S. response. However, the president gave no sign Thursday that he would heed either suggestion. On its face, his decision applies equally to hostile powers such as China and Russia and to close treaty allies such as Canada and Japan. Without major modifications, the president's plan will encourage U.S. allies to join forces with U.S. adversaries. Mr. Mattis also urged making it clear to U.S. industry that protection would be conditional, "to set clear expectations domestically regarding competitiveness." Instead, Mr. Trump promised a roomful of steel and aluminum executives "you'll have protection for the first time in a long while," adding vaguely: "You'll have to regrow your industries, that's all I'm asking."

Mr. Trump's words are not always an exact guide to the policies his administration formally adopts. Already, though, the president and his commerce secretary have legitimized unilateral invocation of a "national security" exception to normal trade rules. Other countries can play that game, too; and more might try, now that the United States has set this bad example.

Race to the bottom, trade war: Call it what you will, the spiral will eventually harm everyone, the United States and its metal industries very much included.

Trump's New Tariffs Could Make Beer, Cars And Baseball Bats More Expensive

By Patrick Gillespie

[CNN Money](#), March 1, 2018

And that's only the beginning. Tariffs, quotas or both could also start a trade war with China.

Trump said Thursday that his administration will impose a 25% tariff on steel imports and 10% tariff on aluminum. He said the official announcement will come next week. It was not clear whether Trump would exempt some countries from the tariffs, as his national security advisers have urged him to do to avoid hurting American allies.

At the heart of the looming trade action is Trump's campaign promise to create good-paying jobs in the United States, particularly in factories, by getting tough on trade. Trump argues that American factory workers have been treated unfairly by trade deals, and many workers agree.

Researchers, though, say automation is much more of a job-killer and the United States should focus more on job training than tariffs. (Trump has said job training is important, but his commitment to funding it is mixed.)

The stock market fell sharply after the announcement. The Dow, S&P 500 and Nasdaq fell more than 1%.

The United States is the world's biggest importer of steel and aluminum, so any of these options would ripple throughout the global economy.

Both metals are crucial raw material for autos, airplanes and appliances made in the United States. The construction, oil and utility industries use them for beams, pipelines and wires, as well as cans for food and drinks.

Imports make up about a third of the 100 million tons of steel used by American businesses every year, and more than 90% of the 5.5 million tons of aluminum used here.

The tariffs by themselves will probably make ordinary items produced with aluminum — think beer cans and baseball bats — more expensive, assuming the companies that make them decide to pass the cost of the tax on to customers. History shows that's generally what happens.

"This action will cause aluminum prices to rise and is likely to lead to job losses across the beer industry," Molson Coors said in a statement. "American workers and American consumers will suffer as a result of this misguided tariff."

Manufacturing advocates say the price increases would be small because the trade measures would boost steel and aluminum production in the United States. U.S. Steel stock jumped 5% on Thursday in anticipation of a tariff announcement.

Those manufacturing advocates also note that when global aluminum prices fell more than 25% a couple years ago, beer companies didn't slash prices at the store. The advocates call hypocrisy on beer companies for complaining now about higher aluminum prices.

Now that Trump has promised tariffs, one big question is how other countries, especially China, might retaliate.

They could slap their own tariffs on American products. Farmers in particular are worried. The United States is one of the world's top producers of soybeans, and its top client for soy is China, one of the countries that Ross recommended targeting with tariffs.

American manufacturers also depend heavily on selling their products abroad to stay afloat and could be hurt by tariffs overseas.

The United States imports most of its steel — 16% — from Canada. It imports 13% from Brazil, 10% from South Korea, 9% from Mexico and 9% from Russia, according to a Department of Commerce report from December 2017.

China would still feel the pain from protective U.S. measures. A lot of China's steel makes its way to the United States indirectly. Economists say China sends unfinished steel products to South Korea and Vietnam, where workers put on the final touches before the finished product is shipped to the United States under another country's label.

The Business Roundtable, a powerful business lobby, has warned that restricting steel and aluminum would "result in foreign retaliation against U.S. exporters and harm the U.S. economy."

There's no telling where a trade war might lead, or where it would end. Trade wars can get out of control. The last large-scale trade war made the Great Depression in the 1930s worse.

This all started last year, when the Trump administration invoked a rarely used law to argue that imports of steel and aluminum from all nations put U.S. national security at risk.

Trade experts compare the law to a sledgehammer. It gives Trump unchecked power: He can raise tariffs or quotas as high as he wants without congressional approval.

There is little doubt that China sells its steel at unfairly low prices. Previous administrations already imposed hundreds of trade sanctions against Chinese steel imported into the United States.

Many economists say China is still flooding global markets with cheap steel, which suppresses prices of steel from other countries that export to the United States.

It's unclear whether tariffs or quotas would fix that global glut of steel. The only certain outcome, trade experts say, is that China would strike back.

Donald Trump Tariffs On Steel, Aluminum Have Bad History

By Bob Bryan

[Business Insider](#), March 1, 2018

President Donald Trump announced new tariffs on imports of steel and aluminum on Thursday.

Trump joins a long list of presidents who have attempted to use trade restrictions to boost US domestic metal producers.

Studies show that these types of moves typically result in a small boost for the industries and serious negative consequences for the broader US economy.

President Donald Trump on Thursday announced that the US will impose new trade restrictions on imports of steel and aluminum in a bid to protect domestic metal producers.

In a meeting with industry executives at the White House, Trump said the new restrictions will come in the form of a broad 25% tariff, or tax on imports, on steel and a 10% tariff on aluminum. He said the restrictions would extend indefinitely.

Trump is not the first president to try and revive the US steel industry, but the massive new tariffs could lead to even more severe consequences than previous trade battles. What's a tariff? They have a history in past trade fights

Presidents dating back to Lyndon Johnson have attempted to curtail the import of foreign steel and boost the US steel industry, using a variety of restrictions.

Most presidents, including Johnson, Richard Nixon, and Ronald Reagan, have used quotas — limits on the amount of steel that can be imported in a given timeframe — to help bolster the US steel industry. For instance, Johnson set a limit for steel imports of 5.75 million tons in 1969.

President Jimmy Carter attempted to curtail steel imports by putting a floor on the price of steel imported into the US. While not technically a tariff, the move essentially forced foreign steel producers to maintain their prices at a certain level and not undercut US producers.

More recent presidents have also attempted to bolster the steel industry as well. President Barack Obama imposed high tariffs on very specific types of steel used in some automobiles in an effort to curb Chinese imports.

Perhaps the most analogous case to Trump's broader tariff comes from President George W. Bush in 2002. Bush attempted to institute tariffs on steel products, ranging from 8% to 30%. After just over a year, Bush was forced to rescind the tariffs due to international backlash and negative economic consequences.

Aluminum restrictions have a less-storied history, as the surge in cheaper foreign imports is a more recent trend. According to the Aluminum Association, a trade and lobbying group, the percentage of aluminum foil consumed in America made by US producers dropped from 84% in 2004 to 69% in 2016. At the same time, Chinese-produced foil went from a 0% market share in 2004 to 22% in 2016.

The recent surge prompted action from aluminum producers to request trade protections. What it means for Americans

According to most studies of these various actions throughout modern history, the US economy and steel

industry has experienced little, if any, positive boost as a result. In fact, many studies show that recent steel restrictions hurt the economy.

Carter's floor on prices did little to stem the steel industry's tanking, and it led to conflicts with both Japan and European nations. Quotas such as those instituted by Johnson and Reagan had little, if any, benefit for the steel industry, as the percentage of imported vs. domestic steel steadily increased.

On a macroeconomic level, studies show that recent attempts by politicians to help the steel industry may have ended up hurting the US economy more than it helped.

By imposing new taxes on metal imports, the price of steel and aluminum will almost certainly increase. This will cause costs for other industries that rely on the two raw goods to jump.

For instance, the beer industry warned before Trump's announcement that a 10% on aluminum would cost beer and beverage producers \$256.3 million and could lead to price increases for consumers.

A downstream labor market impact could also result. Estimates on the job losses due to the Bush tariff in industries that use steel as an import range from 26,000 to 200,000. Additionally, studies of the steel protectionism in the 1970s found that American consumers paid an additional \$290,000 in increased downstream costs to save a single job.

Trump Says He'll Impose Tough Steel, Aluminum Tariffs

By Ellyn Ferguson

Roll Call (DC), March 1, 2018

President Donald Trump announced Thursday that he intends to impose steep tariffs next week on all steel and aluminum imports to protect domestic manufacturers from cheaper foreign products, a move metal producers and their unions support as steel-using industries brace for higher costs and loss of jobs.

"We'll be signing it next week. And you'll have protection for a long time in a while. You'll have to regrow your industries, that's all I'm asking," the president said, according to the White House pool report.

According to Trump, steel imports would face a 25 percent tariff and aluminum imports would face a 10 percent tariff. The move rejects congressional and some business arguments against the tariffs, which could provoke challenges at the World Trade Organization.

The announcement came after Trump held a "listening session" with steel and aluminum industry executives.

The broadly applied tariffs would be an economic blow to China, which has flooded the international markets with aluminum and steel, and to U.S. allies Canada, Mexico, South Korea and Japan. Trade experts have warned that

global tariffs could trigger retaliation from other countries in the form of tariffs or import restrictions against American goods with agricultural products likely to be the early targets.

The tariff announcement comes a day after the U.S. Trade Representative's office released its annual report that includes the administration's often stated sentiment that "countries that refuse to give us reciprocal treatment or who engage in other unfair trading practices will find that we know how to defend our interests."

On Feb. 13, 15 trade associations sent a letter to Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross, U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer and National Economic Council Director Gary Cohn arguing that steel tariffs would raise their costs of doing business and make them less competitive against foreign rivals. They said over the years the U.S. government has already taken action to aid the domestic steel industry with 160 anti-dumping and countervailing duties against 37 countries and 25 categories of basic steel.

Trump Won't Quickly Announce New Tariffs On Aluminum, Steel

The administration had signaled Wednesday night that it would announce the curbs after summoning steel executives to a Thursday meeting

By Peter Nicholas And Jacob M. Schlesinger

[Wall Street Journal](#), March 1, 2018

Full-text stories from the Wall Street Journal are available to Journal subscribers by clicking the link.

U.S. Energy Industry Slams Trump's 'Job-killing' Steel Tariffs

By Erwin Seba, Timothy Gardner

[Reuters](#), March 1, 2018

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EU Promises Firm Response To U.S. Steel Tariffs

[Reuters](#), March 1, 2018

Full-text stories from Reuters currently cannot be included in this document. You may, however, click the link above to access the story.

German Steel Industry Urges EU To Fight U.S. Import Tariffs

[Reuters](#), March 1, 2018

Full-text stories from Reuters currently cannot be included in this document. You may, however, click the link above to access the story.

Canada To Fire Back If Hit With U.S. Steel And Aluminum Tariffs

By Danielle Bochove, Josh Wingrove, And Kristine Owram

[Bloomberg News](#), March 1, 2018

Canada is vowing to retaliate if U.S. President Donald Trump makes good on his pledge to impose steep tariffs on steel and aluminum producers – while holding out hope that it could be exempt.

Trump said he intends to slap a 25 percent duty on steel imports and 10 percent on aluminum in order to protect the national industry, though details remain unclear. His words sent U.S.-based producers rallying but could hurt companies that ship steel and aluminum from Canada, including Rio Tinto Group and Stelco Holdings Inc., without an exemption.

Foreign Minister Chrystia Freeland said that Canada buys more than half of American steel, resulting in a \$2 billion surplus for the U.S. She also said it's "entirely inappropriate" for the U.S. to consider the country a threat to national security.

"We will always stand up for Canadian workers and Canadian businesses," Freeland said Thursday in a statement. "Should restrictions be imposed on Canadian steel and aluminum products, Canada will take responsive measures to defend its trade interests and workers."

Businesses with steel and aluminum operations in Canada were also swift to respond.

'Trade War'

"The President has just initiated an all-out trade war," said Jean Simard, chief executive officer of the Aluminum Association of Canada. Aside from the direct impact on the countries affected, Europe will need to protect itself from a flood of redirected metal because the U.S. is not an open market anymore, he said.

"We have to keep hoping" for an exemption for Canada, Simard said.

London-based Rio Tinto, which ships more than 1.4 million metric tons of aluminum to the U.S. annually from Canada, said it will continue to lobby Washington for an exemption given the highly integrated Canada-U.S. market for autos and other manufactured goods.

"Aluminum from Canada has long been a reliable and secure input for U.S. manufacturers – including the defense sector," Rio Tinto spokesman Matthew Klar said by email. "We will continue to engage with U.S. officials to underscore the benefits of the integrated North American aluminum supply chain, including the jobs it supports on each side of the border."

Stelco Drops

Shares of Canadian steel producer Stelco Holdings fell as much as 6.1 percent. The U.S. accounted for about 14

percent of Stelco's sales in the last six months of 2017, though the American auto industry is a major growth target for Chief Executive Officer Alan Kestenbaum. He said on the company's earnings call last week that he was hopeful Canada would be exempt from the tariffs.

Joseph Galimberti, president of the Canadian Steel Producers Association, said his organization has been "pushing hard" for an exemption. The U.S. hasn't yet indicated if any countries will be excluded. A tariff would hurt Canadian producers in two ways: by raising costs for buyers in the U.S. while also potentially diverting other steel production to flood Canada's own market, he said.

"If Canada's not actually exempted, if a 25 percent tariff is imposed, the government is going to have to be equally reactive in terms of what they do from a domestic policy perspective," Galimberti said.

U.S.-based aluminum producer Alcoa Corp., which has operations in Canada, said certain countries should be excluded from the duties.

"We believe vital trading partners, including Canada, should be exempt from any tariff on aluminum," Alcoa said in an emailed statement. "The aluminum industry has an integrated supply chain and actions should not penalize those that abide by the rules."

Unhappy Canada Says Would Retaliate Against U.S. Steel Tariffs

By Leah Schnurr, Andrea Hopkins

Reuters, March 1, 2018

Full-text stories from Reuters currently cannot be included in this document. You may, however, click the link above to access the story.

Poll: Nearly 60 Percent Of Americans Say Imposing Tariffs On Chinese Steel, Aluminum Is Crucial

By John Binder

Breitbart, March 1, 2018

Nearly 60 percent of American voters say imposing tariffs on Chinese steel and aluminum is crucial to the United States' economic relationship with China.

In a Morning Consult poll, 59 percent of Americans say it is "important" that President Trump place tariffs on imported steel and aluminum, specifically from China, showing a wide range of support for the White House's economic nationalist agenda.

About 66 percent of voters said shrinking America's more than \$375 billion trade deficit with China was key, as well as 56 percent who said they wanted to see the Trump administration challenge China's leaders on intellectual property protection, and 44 percent who said they want China labeled as a currency manipulator.

Trump's cracking down on China when it comes to trade is supported by 67 percent of Republicans, though trade globalists inside the White House — such as Gary Cohn and Steve Mnuchin — have attempted, but failed, to prevent the populist president from taking a tough stance on China.

On, Trump announced that he would eventually be putting a 25 percent tariff on imported steel and a ten percent tariff on imported aluminum, a move that is backed by the majority of Americans, according to the Morning Consult poll.

Multinational free trade agreements have been responsible for massive manufacturing outsourcing and job loss over the last two decades. For example, the KORUS free trade agreement has displaced at least 60,000 American workers since its enactment in 2007.

Meanwhile, since the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) took effect in the 1990s, at least one million net U.S. jobs have been lost because of the free trade deal. About five million manufacturing jobs were lost across the country after NAFTA was signed.

One former steel town in West Virginia lost 94 percent of its steel jobs because of NAFTA, with nearly 10,000 workers in the town being displaced from the steel industry.

Trump's Economic Policy Toward China Elicits Mixed Reviews From Americans

By Ryan Rainey

Morning Consult, February 27, 2018

Kent Hughes, a public policy fellow at the Wilson Center in Washington, said in a Feb. 20 interview that Trump's actions on issues like industrial tariffs and intellectual property "very much fit within the campaign priorities that Trump had articulated." But he said a crowded White House agenda — taxation, immigration and gun laws — China might take a back seat for the time being.

"If I were in that administration and I wanted to make sure that there were some added focus on my China policy, I would wait until these other issues cleared some space for me to make that point," said Hughes, who served as assistant secretary of commerce in the Clinton administration.

Further action against China would likely involve Trump administration officials like U.S. Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer and Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross. But they're only one side of the equation, according to Sen. Sherrod Brown of Ohio, who said the administration has "fallen far short" of his expectations on the trade front.

"The problem in the White House is whispering in one ear are some people who are right on trade like Lighthizer and Ross," Brown said in a Feb. 6 interview. "And in the other ear, you've got all of the Wall Street executives, in his other ear, whispering."

N.R.A. Suggests Trump May Retreat From Gun Control

By Michael D. Shear, Sheryl Gay Stolberg And Thomas Kaplan

New York Times, March 1, 2018

WASHINGTON — The top lobbyist for the National Rifle Association claimed late Thursday that President Trump had retreated from his surprising support a day earlier for gun control measures after a meeting with N.R.A. officials and Vice President Mike Pence in the Oval Office.

Chris Cox, the group's top lobbyist, posted on Twitter just after 9 p.m. that he met with Mr. Trump and Mr. Pence, saying that "we all want safe schools, mental health reform and to keep guns away from dangerous people. POTUS & VPOTUS support the Second Amendment, support strong due process and don't want gun control. #NRA #MAGA."

Mr. Trump tweeted about an hour later: "Good (Great) meeting in the Oval Office tonight with the NRA!"

Sarah Huckabee Sanders, the White House press secretary, declined to provide any details about the previously unannounced meeting. A spokeswoman for the N.R.A.'s lobbying arm, which Mr. Cox heads, did not respond to requests for more information.

But the twin tweets suggest that it may have taken the gun rights group only about 24 hours to persuade the president to back away from the positions he took embracing Democratic gun control measures during a remarkable, televised meeting on Wednesday with members of Congress.

Trump Supports 'Strong' Due Process, Doesn't Want Gun Control

By Daniel Chaitin

Washington Examiner, March 1, 2018

Both President Trump and the National Rifle Association said they had a "great" meeting Thursday evening at the White House, one day after the president roiled gun rights advocates when he suggested illegally taking away guns from dangerous people.

In an enthusiastic tweet, Trump said he had a "Good (Great) meeting in the Oval Office tonight with the NRA!"

That came about an hour after NRA Executive Director Chris Cox said he was assured that Trump not only supports the Second Amendment, but also backs "strong due process and don't want gun control."

On Wednesday, while meeting with a bipartisan group of lawmakers for a discussion on gun control, Trump not only floated the idea of ignoring due process, but also stunned Republicans when he appeared to side with Democrats on gun control.

At one point he disagreed with Vice President Mike Pence's statement that no one's rights should be trampled in gun control legislation.

"Take the firearms first and then go to court," Trump said. "Because that's another system — a lot of times by the time you go to court, it takes so long to go to court, to get the due process procedures." He added, "I like taking the guns early. Like, in this crazy man's case that just took place in Florida. He had a lot of firearms, they saw everything. To go to court would have taken a long time. You could do exactly what you're saying, but take the guns first, go through due process second."

There have been renewed calls of late for some form of gun control measures following a shooting at a high school in Parkland, Fla., which left 17 people dead and several more injured.

Trump expressed openness to a bill with comprehensive background checks and fixes to the FBI's instant background check system. He also seemed to support the idea of raising the legal buying age for a rifle purchase from 18 to 21.

While the NRA is supportive of legislation to "fix" the National Instant Criminal Background Check System, the group opposes raising the minimum age requirement to purchase guns.

Nikolas Cruz, the 19-year-old confessed shooter in last week's shooting, lawfully purchased the AR-15-style rifle that was used to conduct the attack. Some Republicans, including Florida Gov. Rick Scott, have since defied the NRA, calling for the age limit to purchase rifles to be raised to 21.

Trump has repeatedly called out the NRA in the past several days, noting during the meeting Wednesday that some of the lawmakers in attendance were "petrified" of the NRA and that the powerful gun lobby had "less" control over him.

The president also recently told a gathering of governors, "Don't worry about the NRA. They're on our side."

But, he added, "if they're not with you, we have to fight them every once in awhile. That's OK. They're doing what they think is right."

Trump's apparent turnaround with the NRA during their meeting Wednesday is very similar to how he appeared to embrace the Democratic point of view on immigration during a meeting in January. Like that meeting, members of the media were allowed in the room to tape some of the discussion on guns, and by extension, caught a glimpse of some of the perplexed Republicans and gleeful Democrats.

NRA Exec Says Trump Doesn't Want Gun Control After 'Great' Meeting

By Joe Tacopino

New York Post, March 1, 2018

President Trump and an NRA executive had a "good (great)" meeting at the White House on Thursday — one day

after Trump told lawmakers to take people's guns away and "go through due process second."

Trump met with the head of the National Rifle Association's lobbying arm, who stated after the Oval Office sit-down that the president is a steadfast supporter of its pro-gun agenda.

"Good (Great) meeting in the Oval Office tonight with the NRA!" Trump tweeted.

Chris Cox, the executive director of the NRA Institute for Legislative Action, said that the president supports the Second Amendment and safe schools — but not gun control.

"I had a great meeting tonight with @realDonaldTrump & @VP. We all want safe schools, mental health reform and to keep guns away from dangerous people," Cox tweeted.

"POTUS & VPOTUS support the Second Amendment, support strong due process and don't want gun control. #NRA #MAGA"

On Wednesday, Trump told senators that they don't support gun control measures because they are "afraid of the NRA."

NRA's Chris Cox Says Trump Doesn't Want Gun Control After Oval Office Meeting

By Victor Morton

Washington Times, March 1, 2018

The head of the National Rifle Association's lobbying arm met Thursday evening with President Trump and Vice President Mike Pence — and came out crowing.

After the Oval Office meeting, former Rep. Chris Cox, NRA-ILA executive director took to social media and said there would be no gun-control bill and that at least some of Mr. Trump's words on the issue Wednesday, which had stunned both parties, were null and void.

"I had a great meeting tonight with @realDonaldTrump & @VP. We all want safe schools, mental health reform and to keep guns away from dangerous people. POTUS & VPOTUS support the Second Amendment, support strong due process and don't want gun control. #NRA #MAGA," Mr. Cox tweeted.

I had a great meeting tonight with @realDonaldTrump & @VP. We all want safe schools, mental health reform and to keep guns away from dangerous people. POTUS & VPOTUS support the Second Amendment, support strong due process and don't want gun control. #NRA#MAGA — Chris Cox (@ChrisCoxNRA) March 2, 2018

The "strong due process" phrase seems to refer to the most surprising thing Mr. Trump had said Wednesday, backing gun seizures without court orders.

"Take the guns first, go through due process second," he said then.

But on Thursday night, Mr. Trump himself agreed with at least part of Mr. Cox's characterization.

"Good (Great) meeting in the Oval Office tonight with the NRA!" he tweeted about an hour after Mr. Cox did, although he didn't elaborate.

Good (Great) meeting in the Oval Office tonight with the NRA! — Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) March 2, 2018

Regardless, Mr. Cox then promptly retweeted the president.

Trump Recaps Gun Control Meeting: 'Some Good & Some Not So Good' Ideas Emerged

By Louis Nelson

Politico, March 1, 2018

President Donald Trump on Thursday offered an online readout of his meeting with lawmakers on gun control held a day earlier, declaring that "a bill should emerge" from the conversations that have begun in the wake of a mass shooting last month at a Florida high school.

"Many ideas, some good & some not so good, emerged from our bipartisan meeting on school safety yesterday at the White House," Trump wrote on Twitter. "Background Checks a big part of conversation. Gun free zones are proven targets of killers. After many years, a Bill should emerge. Respect 2nd Amendment!"

The president held an hourlong meeting Wednesday with lawmakers from both parties at which he chided Republicans for being "afraid of the NRA" and advocated for raising to 21 the age at which certain types of rifles can be purchased. Such a proposal goes against positions held by many conservatives, as does another of Trump's proposals, expanded background checks for gun purchasers.

That Trump has staked out a substantially different position from that of the NRA has surprised some, given the support that the gun rights group lent the president during the 2016 campaign.

Still, lawmakers from both parties expressed skepticism Wednesday that the president would hold fast to the proposals he outlined on Wednesday, recalling a similar meeting on immigration held in January, during which Trump delighted Democrats with his apparent willingness to cut a deal only to retrench to a more conservative-friendly position days later.

Republican And Democratic Lawmakers Get Facts Wrong On Gun Policy

By Linda Qiu

New York Times, March 1, 2018

President Trump discussed potential solutions to curb gun violence on Wednesday during a televised meeting with a bipartisan group of lawmakers.

The president strayed from the facts during his remarks, as The New York Times reported previously. Here is a look at

the claims made during the session by other lawmakers — Republicans and Democrats — that may have strayed from the facts or otherwise require some additional context. "This is when the 10-year assault weapon ban was in — how incidents and deaths dropped. When it ended, you see it going up." — Senator Dianne Feinstein. This needs context.

In the past, Ms. Feinstein has referenced an analysis by Louis Klarevas, a lecturer at the University of Massachusetts Boston, that found the assault weapons ban drastically reduced gun massacres.

But it's difficult to directly link declines in crime or gun violence to any specific law, given the limited scope and loopholes in each one, according to most experts and research.

As The Times has previously reported:

The 1994 ban on assault weapons has become a particular and recent subject of intense debate. The N.R.A. has cited a 2004 analysis funded by the Justice Department to argue that the "ban could not be credited with any reduction in crime."

On the other hand, Senator Dianne Feinstein, Democrat of California, has claimed in a Twitter post that "the number of gun massacres fell by 37%" while the ban was in place.

Christopher Koper, a professor at George Mason University in Fairfax, Va., and the lead author of the study that is cited by the N.R.A., has repeatedly said that the ban had mixed effects and final results would not be immediately evident.

"My work is often cited in misleading ways that don't give the full picture," Mr. Koper said Thursday in an email. "These laws can modestly reduce shootings overall" and reduce the number and severity of mass shootings. "These shooters typically are males. They're white and they're suicidal." — Senator Steve Daines, Republican of Montana True.

A database maintained by Mother Jones, a progressive magazine, shows that 95 out of 97 mass shootings from 1982 to 2018 involved male gunmen. Fifty-five were committed by white men. "The states that have these background checks, they have a 38 percent lower domestic homicide rate — this is domestic violence." — Senator Amy Klobuchar, Democrat of Minnesota Causation is not clear.

Ms. Klobuchar is probably referring to a report from Everytown for Gun Safety, a gun control advocacy group, that claims "38 percent fewer women" are "shot to death by intimate partners" in states that require background checks for all handgun sales.

This analysis, however, does not account for other factors that contribute to domestic violence, leading other researchers to question the sweeping conclusion about background checks.

April Zeoli, a professor at Michigan State University who studies intimate partner violence, called the Everytown estimate a "back of the napkin" calculation.

Ms. Zeoli's research has found that state laws restricting access to firearms for people who have been convicted of domestic violence result in declines in intimate partner homicides; specifically, 11 percent from laws that mandate buyers to get a permit whether they're purchasing from licensed or private dealers, she said. (Other research also shows this.)

Unlike Everytown, Ms. Zeoli also looked at state domestic violence laws, poverty and divorce rates, average amounts of public assistance, educational attainment gaps between men and women, homicides not related to domestic violence, percentage of suicides by firearms as a proxy for gun ownership rates and law enforcement availability. "Those are areas where there are no guns. The reason I carry a concealed firearm everywhere I go is because I don't know where those gun-free zones are, that I may walking through at the mall, or at the doughnut shop, or wherever I might be." — Representative John Rutherford, Republican of Florida This needs context.

As Mr. Rutherford and Mr. Trump discussed concealed-carry laws, Mr. Trump said, "You're not allowed concealed in a gun-free zone." The exchange highlights how amorphous the term "gun-free zone" has become.

Federal law prohibits firearms in grade schools, but makes explicit exceptions for security personnel and instructional purposes (hunting classes, for example). So, Mr. Rutherford is wrong to state that there are never guns in "gun-free zones."

Furthermore, at least eight states allow concealed carry for teachers at grade schools, and two others have eased restrictions, according to the Giffords Law Center, a gun control advocacy group.

Private businesses may also ban civilian use of firearms on their premises, but state laws vary on how and on the extent to which a business can opt out.

Texas has very specific requirements for the signs businesses put up to indicate that they do not allow firearms on their properties. (For example, they must be in both English and Spanish.) North Carolina requires signs to be "conspicuous," while Florida has no explicit rules. Florida is one of 23 states that require business owners to allow guns in cars parked on company property. "People just want to dismiss concealed-carry permits. They do actually increase safety." — Representative Steve Scalise, Republican of Louisiana This is disputed.

When asked what data Mr. Scalise was referring to, a spokesman told The Times, "Since the early '90s, the significant increase in the issuance of concealed-carry permits by states has been accompanied by a significant drop

in violent crime rates — and that includes millions of new permits being issued in the last decade or so.”

The spokesman cited the work of John R. Lott Jr., an economist and gun rights advocate whose book “More Guns, Less Crime” makes the case that “passing concealed-handgun laws deters violent crime.” But Mr. Lott’s findings have been questioned by other academics.

In 2005, a panel at the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine concluded that “no link between right-to-carry laws and changes in crime is apparent in the raw data, even in the initial sample.”

Other researchers have reached an opposite conclusion. In a 2017 study, John Donohue, a professor at Stanford Law School, found that states that adopted right-to-carry laws saw an increase in violent crime.

GOP Cautious, Dems Elated, By Trump's Stance On Guns

By Lisa Mascaro, Matthew Daly And Catherine Lucey
Associated Press, March 1, 2018

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republicans reacted cautiously Thursday to President Donald Trump’s call for quick and substantial changes to the nation’s gun laws, while elated Democrats said they will try to hold Trump to his promises.

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said Democrats were “stunned and surprised — many of us pleasantly — by what we saw” from Trump at a televised meeting Wednesday at the White House.

Schumer said he was especially pleased that Trump seemed to endorse universal background checks for gun purchases and even seemed open to a politically controversial ban on assault weapons such as the AR-15 rifle used in last month’s shooting at a Florida high school.

“The president started on the right foot, but we must work together to get it done,” Schumer said Thursday at a news conference where he outlined new Democratic proposals for gun control. “Words alone will not prevent the next mass shooting. One public meeting will not close background check loopholes. One hour of television won’t get assault weapons off our streets.”

Texas Sen. John Cornyn, the No. 2 Republican in the Senate, said Trump hosted “an amazing meeting” about how to respond to the deadly Florida shooting, but his legislation to strengthen the federal background check system was “our best and only option to act in response.”

President Donald Trump said Wednesday that Congress should act quickly on gun laws as he convened lawmakers at the White House and pushed for tougher background checks, school safety and mental health resources to prevent shootings. (Feb. 28)

Cornyn and other Republicans have resisted a comprehensive approach to gun legislation, even as Trump and Democrats say more must be done.

Trump held a freewheeling, televised meeting with lawmakers at the White House that stretched for an hour Wednesday, and he rejected both his party’s incremental approach and its strategy that has stalled action on gun legislation.

Giving hope to Democrats, he said he favored a “comprehensive” approach to addressing gun violence.

Trump again voiced support for expanded background checks. He endorsed increased school security and more mental health resources, and he reaffirmed his support for raising the age to 21 for purchasing some firearms. Trump mentioned arming teachers, and said his administration, not Congress, would ban “bump-stock” devices that enable guns to fire like automatic weapons with an executive order.

“We can’t wait and play games and nothing gets done,” Trump told the session with 17 House and Senate lawmakers.

Trump raised eyebrows by suggesting that law enforcement officials should be able to confiscate people’s firearms without a court order to prevent potential tragedies.

“Take the guns first, go through due process second,” he suggested.

Trump arose Thursday with the gun issue on his mind, tweeting that “Many ideas, some good & some not so good,” emerged from the meeting.

He said “Background Checks a big part of conversation” and “Gun free zones are proven targets of killers.”

“After many years, a Bill should emerge,” Trump went on. “Respect 2nd Amendment!”

Trump’s suggestion to take guns away drew immediate criticism from Republicans.

“Is anyone ok with this, because I’m sure as hell not,” Rep. Thomas Massie, R-Ky., tweeted on Thursday. “I swore an oath to support and defend the constitution. Speak up.” Massie is a conservative who is backed by tea party groups.

The president has previously supported ideas popular with Democrats, only to back away when faced with opposition from his conservative supporters and his GOP allies in Congress. It was not clear whether he would continue to push for swift and significant changes to gun laws, when confronted with the inevitable resistance from his party.

Still, the televised discussion allowed Trump to present himself as a potential dealmaker. Democratic lawmakers appealed to the president to use his political power to persuade his party to take action.

“It is going to have to be you,” Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Conn., told Trump.

Trump’s call for stronger background checks, which are popular among Americans, has been resisted by Republicans

and the NRA. Republicans are leaning toward modest legislation designed to improve the background check system. Trump made clear he was looking for more and accused lawmakers of being "petrified" of the gun lobby.

Democrats said they were concerned Trump's interest may fade quickly. After the meeting, Murphy told reporters: "I'm worried that this was the beginning and the end of the president's advocacy on this issue. The White House has to put some meat on the bones. The White House has to send a proposal to Congress."

NRA spokeswoman Jennifer Baker said that while the White House meeting "made for great TV, the gun-control proposals discussed would make for bad policy that would not keep our children safe."

Trump rejected the way Republican leaders in Congress have framed the debate, saying the House-backed bill linking a background check measure with a bill to expand gun rights by allowing gun owners to carry concealed weapons across state lines was not the right approach.

The concealed carry measure is the gun lobby's top legislative priority. But "you'll never get it passed," Trump told lawmakers.

He suggested Republicans should focus on the background check bill, then load it up with other gun control and safety measures.

Among those at the meeting were Sens. Pat Toomey, R-Pa., and Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., who are pushing their bill to broaden background checks to include firearm purchases online and at gun shows. The bill failed in 2013 after the elementary school shooting in Newtown, Connecticut.

Trump asked Toomey if the bill would raise the minimum age for young people to buy an assault weapon. Toomey told the president it did not.

"You know why," Trump scoffed. "Because you're afraid of the NRA."

In fact, Toomey's bill was opposed by the NRA. The group downgraded its rating of Toomey as he ran for re-election in 2016.

Toomey said Thursday that Trump called him to express support for the background checks bill "as the core legislative vehicle" for what Congress does on guns.

Associated Press writers Ken Thomas, Alan Fram, Andrew Taylor, Zeke Miller and Jill Colvin contributed to this report.

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Baffled Republicans Distance Themselves From Trump On Guns

By Melanie Zanona

The Hill, March 1, 2018

House conservatives say they are baffled by President Trump's recent support for a string of Democratic-backed gun control ideas, with some lawmakers even questioning how committed he is to protecting the Second Amendment.

"I don't know how he came unmoored," said libertarian Rep. Thomas Massie (R-Ky.), one of the staunchest defenders of gun rights in Congress.

"President Trump can do more damage than President Obama did to the Second Amendment with the bully pulpit, because Republicans instinctively rejected anything Obama put forward."

House Republicans expressed a mix of shock, frustration and disappointment that Trump endorsed a Democratic "wish list" of gun control proposals during a meeting on Wednesday at the White House. The ideas he spoke favorably of included imposing new age limits on gun purchases and taking guns away from dangerous people.

Republicans in both chambers of Congress, and particularly the House, made clear they have little interest in adopting Trump's "comprehensive" approach.

"On a lot of these issues, where we believe that there is an infringement on Second Amendment liberties, we're going to be opposed to those," said Rep. Jim Jordan (R-Ohio), a member of the House Freedom Caucus, a band of roughly 30 conservative hard-liners.

Trump has been eager to take action on gun control following a deadly mass shooting at a Florida high school last month, with student survivors emerging as powerful voices in the politically charged debate.

The president has since hosted a series of listening sessions on gun violence, including the televised meeting at the White House with a bipartisan group of lawmakers on Wednesday.

During the freewheeling, hourlong session, Trump delighted Democrats and infuriated Republicans when he voiced support for expanded background checks and urged lawmakers to dramatically expand the scope of their legislative response, which GOP leaders had tried to keep as narrow as possible.

"I was surprised that he basically just incorporated the whole wish list of gun control into his proposed omnibus gun control bill," Massie said.

In one stunning moment, Trump also advocated for confiscating guns from individuals deemed dangerous without following due process.

"I like taking the guns early, like in this crazy man's case that just took place in Florida ... to go to court would have taken a long time," Trump said. "Take the guns first, go through due process second."

Conservatives said they were having a hard time wrapping their heads around that statement.

Rep. Warren Davidson (R-Ohio), who wasn't watching the meeting live, said his phone was "blowing up" with concerned text messages from constituents asking whether Trump's comments were real and urging Davidson to "do something" in response.

"When talking with colleagues, that's the piece that's getting the most traction," Davidson said.

Massie, who heads the congressional Second Amendment caucus, called it Trump's "most disappointing statement."

"He broadened the concern beyond the Second Amendment: they can take any piece of your property without due process, if due process is no longer a value he believes in," said Massie, who let out both long sighs and incredulous laughs during a phone interview with The Hill.

That wasn't the only idea Trump mentioned Wednesday that is anathema to the GOP and National Rifle Association (NRA).

The president reiterated his support for raising the age requirement for purchasing assault-style rifles from 18 to 21, an idea fiercely opposed by the NRA and conservatives.

In fact, Massie on Thursday said he would seek to scale back age restrictions for guns, not raise new ones, by introducing legislation that would lower the age for buying a handgun from 21 to 18.

Under current law, someone must be 18 years old to buy a rifle and 21 years old to buy a handgun.

"It's unconstitutional to completely extinguish the Second Amendment for a category of adults," Massie said.

Trump also waded into the hot-button debate over the federal criminal background check system for gun purchases.

Not only did Trump express support for a far more expansive bill from Sens. Pat Toomey (R-Pa.) and Joe Manchin (D-W.Va.) to expand background checks for firearms bought at gun shows and over the internet, he also forcefully rejected the idea of attaching a more narrow background check bill to controversial legislation backed by the NRA that would allow people to carry concealed weapons across state lines.

"All that legislation has problems," Jordan said, referring to the background check bills.

Conservatives have major due process concerns with the most modest background check bill, called the Fix NICS (National Instant Criminal Background Check System) Act, because they worry it will allow the government to easily take away a person's Second Amendment rights.

They only agreed to vote for Fix NICS after House GOP leaders attached the measure to the concealed carry reciprocity bill and promised not to decouple the two issues.

Jordan said he has reminded leadership of their commitment, while Davidson dismissed concerns that GOP leaders would break their promise just because of Trump's comments.

Speaker Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) said earlier this week he would wait to see what the Senate does on Fix NICS before deciding whether to put it on the floor as a stand-alone bill.

But Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) on Thursday announced that his chamber would be moving to banking legislation next week, rather than a background check bill.

The Senate's move makes it a real possibility that Republicans will ignore their president's wishes for a gun vote — and lawmakers made clear that it's their prerogative to do so.

"There's a reason we have separation of powers," Davidson said. "I'm not particularly concerned that our House leadership would renege on what they had committed to do."

Conservatives Floored By Trump's Gun Control Lovefest

Many Republicans tried to rationalize the president's embrace of gun control advocates' wish list.

By Burgess Everett And Rachael Bade

Politico, March 1, 2018

Minutes into Donald Trump's renegade embrace of the left's wish list for gun control, Republican Rep. Warren Davidson's phone lines blew up.

"What is Trump doing?" texted one angry constituent from his conservative southwest Ohio district, according to Davidson. "You've got to stop this," demanded another. "That can't be real," Davidson recalled thinking as his supporters — all Trump enthusiasts — unloaded on the president.

Then he reviewed the full video clip. "I was like, 'You're kidding me, right?'" he said in an interview. "It was a bit shocking."

Trump threw decades of party orthodoxy on gun rights out the window on Wednesday, as he mused aloud about enacting a comprehensive gun control package and said due process should come after guns are taken away from dangerous people.

The response on Thursday among congressional Republicans was a mix of disbelief, denial and outrage. The GOP has its rifts on hot-button issues like immigration and health care. But its devotion to expansive gun rights has been close to absolute. As Sen. John Thune (R-S.D.) put it, "Everyone says it's the NRA" that explains the GOP's devotion to the cause. "No. It's your constituents."

"Most of the ideas ... will not improve safety of our schools and protect our kids," said Sen. Steve Daines (R-Mont.), a staunch gun rights advocate.

"When it comes down to it, his administration will have a problem," Rep. Dave Brat (R-Va.) said of Trump's call to increase the age for some firearm purchases or to seize weapons in some cases without a court order.

But Trump is still president. So they were more prone to rationalize or explain away his apparent openness to an assault weapons ban and more background checks — among other items on gun control advocates' policy menu — than to go after him directly.

Maybe Trump didn't mean what he said, some of them mused, or perhaps had been misunderstood. Others held out that he would come to his senses and quickly end his flirtation with Democrats.

"That was yesterday. This is today," said Sen. Roy Blunt of Missouri, a state that overwhelmingly supported Trump.

"Anytime you have somebody wanting to take away life, liberty or property without due process, that is a concern," added Sen. Mike Lee (R-Utah). "I would like to figure out what he meant."

"I don't know how much thought he put into what he actually was saying, in terms of the details of it," offered Sen. Shelley Moore Capito (R-W.Va.)

Republicans have adopted a strategy of not necessarily taking what Trump says in showman mode at face value. Meeting with Democrats and Republicans at the White House in January, he talked up liberal immigration proposals only to backpedal later, when conservatives howled.

It doesn't do much good, Republicans reason, to attack the leader of their party over a position he might not hold for more than a couple of days.

And practically speaking, it will be nearly impossible for Congress to pass much more than a bill to improve background checks, given the hardened GOP opposition. Even a modest background-checks bill is being held up by Lee and like-minded conservatives, who say it would trample the due process rights of veterans.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) has balked at a guns debate in the immediate aftermath of the massacre of 17 people in Florida, a delay that could sap the energy of gun control activists.

"If he embraces some of the things he talked about yesterday, a lot of folks up here on our side are not going to be for some of that stuff," Thune said of Trump's gun push.

While Republicans think it's important to discourage the president from upsetting his rural, gun-loving base, most have taken to privately registering those feelings of discomfort with the White House rather than dressing down the president publicly. It's a courtesy they never extended to President Barack Obama after his calls for tougher background checks.

Instead, most Republicans spent Thursday highlighting the problems with Trump's seeming support for proposals advocated by the likes of Sens. Dianne Feinstein of California and Chris Murphy of Connecticut.

"I'm a firm believer that due process means that you get a lawyer, a trial, a hearing, an impartial court making a decision before any of your rights are taken away," Sen.

Rand Paul (R-Ky.) said of Trump's call to "take the gun first, go through due process second."

House Freedom Caucus founder Jim Jordan (R-Ohio) similarly shied away from criticizing Trump personally, while firmly rejecting the bulk of the ideas the president floated Wednesday. Jordan emphasized similarities with Trump's viewpoints on arming teachers, and turned his criticisms toward Democrats instead of the White House.

"On the most fundamental level in Florida, we had the most systemic failure of government to deal with this bad guy, and now we're supposed to say the answer is more government?" he asked. "The premise that so many on the left have — so many Democrats — I just don't buy into that premise."

But didn't Trump buy that premise? "All I know is the answer is not more government," Jordan replied.

There's a smaller faction of Capitol Hill Republicans who've attacked the president personally on guns. Rep. Thomas Massie (R-Ky.), who leads the House's gun caucus, tweeted Thursday that "like liberals, @realDonaldTrump mentions Columbine, Pulse, Sandy Hook to motivate gun control, but totally ignores how guns were acquired: columbine: straw purchases, pulse: registered security guard, sandy hook: stolen. DISGRACEFUL!"

There were a few Republicans who applauded Trump. They included Sens. Jeff Flake of Arizona and Pat Toomey of Pennsylvania, who are pushing proposals to raise the age limit for buying some rifles and to enforce background checks for internet and gun show sales.

"He was enthusiastic about it," beamed Toomey after Trump lavished praise on his background-checks plan.

The pair of GOP senators and some Democrats, meanwhile, held out hope that perhaps Trump could finally break the entrenched politics of gun control by getting behind "common-sense" regulations. It's one thing when a Democratic president calls for stricter gun rules; it's a different equation when a pro-NRA Republican president does so.

"There's no one concerned about Donald Trump taking their Second Amendment rights away," Manchin said.

That still might be wishful thinking. Senators said Trump would struggle to move all but a handful of Republicans in the Senate. And in the more conservative House, prospects for new gun laws look even bleaker.

"There's no changing minds," said Sen. Jim Inhofe (R-Okla.).

Republicans Irate, Democrats Press After Trump Gun Control Meeting

By Griffin Connolly

Roll Call (DC), March 1, 2018

As Republican leaders scrambled to address the apparent disconnect between themselves and President

Donald Trump on gun control legislation at a bipartisan meeting of lawmakers on Wednesday, Democrats pressured the president to keep his word.

"We're not ditching any Constitutional protections simply because the last person the President talked to today doesn't like them," GOP Sen. Ben Sasse of Nebraska said in a statement Wednesday.

Trump raised eyebrows — and apparently Republicans' blood pressure — at the meeting when he signaled he wanted law enforcement to confiscate guns from the mentally unstable before they received due process in court.

"I don't want mentally ill people to be having guns," Trump said. "You have to do something very decisive. Number one, you can take the guns away immediately from people that you can judge easily are mentally ill, like [the Parkland shooter]. You know, the police saw that he was a problem. They didn't take any guns away. Now, that could have been policing. I think they should have taken them away anyway, whether they had the right or not. But I'll tell you this, you have to have very strong provisions for the mentally ill."

Some GOP lawmakers defended the president as a newcomer to the national debate on gun control and claiming Trump didn't mean what he said.

"He's not a legal scholar," North Carolina GOP Sen. Thom Tillis said. "I know you heard the words. I just don't believe in my heart of hearts that's exactly what he meant."

"I don't ever believe there's a time in this country where due process can be dismissed, period," Tillis added.

To some, like Senate Majority Whip John Cornyn of Texas, the meeting, broadcast live on television, encapsulated the feeling of being on one of the reality star-turned-president's TV shows. Cornyn is sponsoring legislation intended to make the criminal background check system work better.

"I thought it was fascinating television," Cornyn told the New York Times. "It was surreal to actually be there."

As Trump repeatedly bucked Republican leaders on gun measures, Democrats seemed to want to reinforce his statements.

"You saw the president clearly saying not once, not twice, not three times, but like 10 times, that he wanted to see a strong universal background check bill," Sen. Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota told the Times. "He didn't mince words about it. So I do not understand how then he could back away from that."

Democratic Sen. Christopher S. Murphy of Connecticut, a leading gun control advocate on Capitol Hill, urged the administration to follow through on the president's words Wednesday.

"The White House can now launch a lobbying campaign to get universal background checks passed, as the president promised in this meeting, or they can sit and do nothing," Murphy said.

In a series of tweets Thursday morning, the president did not address the criticism Republicans levied against him after the meeting, instead saying it was "an honor" to host the bipartisan group of lawmakers.

"Many ideas, some good and some not so good, emerged from our bipartisan meeting on school safety yesterday at the White House," Trump tweeted. "Background Checks a big part of conversation. Gun free zones are proven targets of killers. After many years, a bill should emerge. Respect 2nd Amendment!"

Democrats Demand Bill With Expanded Background Checks, Gun Confiscations

By David Sherfinski

Washington Times, March 1, 2018

Senate Democrats offered their ante Thursday in the renewed gun control debate, saying any bill must expand background checks and allow court-ordered gun confiscations while demanding a vote on a semi-automatic rifle ban — though they said that is not a deal-breaker if it doesn't become law.

Senate Minority Leader Charles E. Schumer of New York said his Democratic caucus is prepared to provide a "very large" number of votes for those priorities. He called for a free-ranging debate on the chamber floor, where he said he would accept the outcome.

"This is what we think should be done. This is the right thing to do ... but if we can get a good portion of it and not all of it, fine," Mr. Schumer said. "To get these things done, I'm not drawing any lines in the sand."

Democrats sense they may have gained the upper hand in the debate after a stunning meeting Wednesday between members of Congress and President Trump at the White House, where Mr. Trump shot down several Republican priorities and accused lawmakers of being "petrified" of the National Rifle Association.

Mr. Schumer said he is counting on Mr. Trump and that the extent of a final bill will depend on how far the president is willing to push members of his own party.

"The only hope of passing this, given that Democrats are so strongly for these proposals, is the president persuading Republicans and frankly giving them cover from the NRA," he said.

After years of stalemate, the debate in the wake of the Valentine's Day massacre at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, feels different.

Police say Nikolas Cruz, the 19-year-old accused of slaying 17 people, showed warning signs that he wanted to hurt people with guns before he carried an AR-15-style rifle into his former high school on Feb. 14.

Mr. Schumer said Democrats will push for protective court orders that would allow law enforcement or family

members to petition judges to block people from getting guns if they see danger signs.

Mr. Schumer said Democrats' big goal is expanding gun purchase background checks to cover private sales at gun shows or online. These sales currently are exempt from federal requirements. A more modest background check measure that encourages record-sharing, which has wide bipartisan support, isn't enough, he said.

"Rather than just plugging one leak, we need a holistic approach that improves our gun safety laws from top to bottom," he said.

Mr. Schumer also said Democrats want a debate on the Senate floor on a so-called assault weapons ban, though he acknowledged it would be unlikely to pass, with opposition from members of his own party as well as Republicans.

House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, California Democrat, said her troops also will embrace gun violence restraining orders and comprehensive background checks. She said an assault weapons ban could take longer.

"We need to have the best package we can get done now," Mrs. Pelosi said.

Some senators pushed for a debate this week, but the Senate spent its time jumping through Democrat-imposed procedural hoops to confirm some of Mr. Trump's nominees. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, Kentucky Republican, said a banking bill will be on the floor next week.

Lawmakers also are staring at the next government funding deadline on March 23, which could further delay a potentially divisive gun debate.

While Democrats show significant unity as they approach the debate, Republicans are fractured.

Sen. Marco Rubio, Florida Republican, said Thursday that he will introduce a version of the gun violence restraining order and that he wants to increase federal funding for school safety initiatives and crack down on people who purchase weapons illegally.

He said he would continue to look into new age restrictions for buying certain guns and limits on ammunition magazine capacity, but he added that those ideas aren't as likely to attract widespread support in Congress.

"Do not hold hostage a piece of legislation that would work and that we all support because it doesn't have everything you want," Mr. Rubio urged his colleagues in a floor speech.

Sen. Jeff Flake, Arizona Republican, along with Sen. Martin Heinrich, New Mexico Democrat, and Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto, Nevada Democrat, introduced a bill Thursday to prohibit the sale of "bump stocks" — devices that convert a semi-automatic shotgun into a fully automatic weapon that gained attention after the Las Vegas shooting last year.

Mr. Trump has ordered Attorney General Jeff Sessions to craft a ban, but lawmakers have pointed to multiple rulings during President Obama's administration that the Bureau of

Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives lacks the capacity to regulate many of them.

"A temporary regulatory fix is no substitute for permanent law," Mr. Flake said.

Mr. Flake is part of bipartisan Senate groups pushing legislation to raise the minimum age to purchase certain rifles from 18 to 21 and to prevent people on "no fly" or terrorism watch lists from buying guns.

Sen. Patrick J. Toomey, Pennsylvania Republican, and Sen. Joe Manchin III, West Virginia Democrat, are also co-sponsors of the "no fly, no buy" legislation. Mr. Toomey said they are eyeing a new version of the bipartisan legislation they introduced in 2013 that would expand background checks to gun sales at gun shows and online.

Mr. Trump said the Toomey-Manchin legislation could serve as the basis for a more comprehensive bill, though the White House seemed to walk that back Thursday.

"I can't say where we fall in position on that piece of legislation at this point," said White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders. "He's continuing to have conversations."

Trump Says He's Not Afraid Of The NRA. Prove It.

By Joe Scarborough

Washington Post, March 1, 2018

Who's afraid of the National Rifle Association? Apparently, not President Trump.

At Wednesday's White House gathering on guns, the president mocked Republican lawmakers for fearing NRA executive Wayne LaPierre and his team of D.C. lobbyists.

"Some of you people are petrified of the NRA. You can't be petrified," the president told the bipartisan group of gobsnacked guests. "They have great power over you people, they have less power over me."

If LaPierre's grip on Trump is loosening, perhaps it is because every poll published since the massacre at a Parkland, Fla., high school shows that Americans want tougher gun-safety laws. Or maybe it is because the president spent the past week watching one Fortune 500 company after another sever ties with the NRA. For a businessman who holds corporate chief executives in far higher regard than he does political players such as LaPierre, the business world's reaction to Parkland had to be eye-opening.

Walmart, the country's largest private-sector employer, announced on Wednesday that it would immediately raise the minimum age for gun purchases to 21. The giant retailer emphasized that it already barred the sale of assault-style weapons, bump stocks, high-capacity magazines and "similar accessories." Walmart's statement followed the announcement of Dick's Sporting Goods that it, too, was

ending the sale of assault-style weapons and raising its gun-purchase age to 21. The CEO of America's largest sporting-goods chain, Edward W. Stack, told NBC News, "We don't want to be a part of the story any longer."

Other corporate leaders reached that same conclusion earlier in the week. Delta Air Lines, United Airlines, MetLife, Avis, National Car Rental, Enterprise Rent-A-Car, Lockton Affinity, First National Bank of Omaha and Republic Bank were some of the companies that cut ties with LaPierre's lobbying organization after Parkland. FedEx, criticized for providing a standard discount to NRA members, took the extraordinary step of releasing a policy statement calling for a ban on assault-style weapons.

"FedEx Corporation's positions on the issue of gun policy and safety differ from those of the National Rifle Association," it said. "FedEx opposes assault rifles being in the hands of civilians . . . [and] views assault rifles and large capacity magazines as inherent potential dangers to schools, workplaces, and communities." The company then called for "urgent action" on the local, state and national level to prevent future tragedies.

If Trump's instinct is to fear the NRA less and follow the guidance of legendary business leaders such as FedEx's Fred Smith more, data suggest it would be a wise political move. Even before the most recent mass shooting, the influence of LaPierre's organization on elections was fading. In the Virginia governor's race, Democratic candidate Ralph Northam cheerfully embraced his "F" rating from the NRA while campaigning for universal background checks. Despite the NRA pouring more than \$1 million into ads against him, Northam easily defeated Republican Ed Gillespie. He is the second-straight candidate opposed by the NRA to be elected governor in the gun group's home state.

Tales of the gun lobby's outsize influence also took a pounding in December's Senate race in Alabama. There, the NRA spent nearly \$55,000 on a mailer claiming that Democrat Doug Jones "can't be trusted to support your Second Amendment rights" and "will be another vote for the Bloomberg-Schumer-Pelosi gun control agenda!"

As did their counterparts in Virginia, Alabama residents ignored LaPierre's fear tactics and voted again for the supposed gun-grabber. But that charge has proven to be just as baseless as the fear that Republican legislators in Congress hold for gun lobbyists — whose radical views are out of step even with Republican voters and many members of the NRA itself.

Maybe Trump is finally on to something. Maybe he will decide that this is the time for real progress on common-sense gun-safety legislation. He could do it because it's the right thing to do. Or he could do it because it's the smart thing to do. But if he chooses instead to let his party continue to languish in fear, Republicans will just be giving Americans

one more reason to vote them out of power — and relegate Trumpism to the ash heap of history.

Trump's Gun Control Embrace Sets Off Scramble In Congress

Senators on both sides of the aisle unveiled proposals, though it's unclear what might gain traction.

By Elana Schor

Politico, March 1, 2018

President Donald Trump's unexpected openness to expansive gun control measures set off a scramble in the Senate Thursday, with lawmakers in both parties laying out a raft of competing proposals and jockeying for position.

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) outlined his caucus' three top priorities in the gun control debate — expanded background checks, judicial orders that would temporarily let guns be taken from dangerous individuals, and at least a vote on banning assault weapons — as Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) pitched his own package of gun and school safety plans.

Sens. Jeff Flake (R-Ariz.) and Martin Heinrich (D-N.M.) released a new bill banning "bump stocks," even as other Republicans indicated they would prefer to wait for the Trump administration's regulatory crackdown on the devices that boost the rate of fire of semi-automatic weapons.

The flurry of action suggests Trump's wild-card support Wednesday for proposals to expand background checks and raise the age limit for certain rifle purchases has caused plenty of political ripples — if not yet a wave big enough to unite lawmakers behind a single approach.

"The president started on the right foot, but we must work together to get it done," Schumer told reporters Thursday as he announced Democrats' gun policy priorities. "Words alone will not prevent the next mass shooting. One public meeting will not close background check loopholes."

With few Republicans quickly embracing Trump's support for expanded background checks for gun buyers, one of that effort's top sponsors urged him to keep pressing the issue.

"This is about the president," Sen. Joe Manchin (D-W.Va.) told reporters. "He's the only person who can get this out."

Manchin and his partner on the background-checks bill, Sen. Pat Toomey (R-Pa.), will have more time to twist arms next week.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) has teed up floor debate on bipartisan legislation easing some regulatory requirements under the Dodd-Frank financial reform law. Senators in both parties predicted that gun-related amendments may be offered to that bill as the broader debate continues, with Manchin predicting that guns would remain in "the hot seat."

Rubio had previously garnered a positive response in his home state, where the Valentine's Day killing of 17 students and faculty members has sparked a potentially major shift in gun politics. But after indicating that he would support raising the required age for purchases of AR-15-style rifles, which have been used in multiple mass shootings, Rubio shied away from the idea, which splits his fellow Senate Republicans.

Rubio said in prepared remarks on the Senate floor that while he would "continue to explore additional reforms" on rifle-buyer age limits and firearm magazine capacity, those proposals "will need to be crafted in a way that actually contributes to greater public safety, while also not unnecessarily or unfairly infringing on" gun owners' Second Amendment rights."

Instead, he called for creating "gun violence restraining orders" that would allow a court to intervene while respecting due process as well as reauthorizing school safety grants. Rubio also previewed a forthcoming proposal from senators in both parties that would mandate FBI notification to states when individuals barred from buying guns attempt to purchase them.

Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Chuck Grassley also announced Thursday that he will hold an oversight hearing on March 14 examining the school shooting in Parkland, Florida.

Grassley has already sought briefings from the FBI and social media companies about advance notice that law enforcement officials received — but failed to act on — concerning the threat posed by Florida perpetrator Nikolas Cruz.

"The great tragedy of the Parkland shooting is that it was preventable," Grassley told committee members. "The FBI and local law enforcement failed to act on credible tips that should have neutralized the killer and gotten him help."

Grassley also offered strong support for a narrow, bipartisan bill designed to improve the existing background-check system. Republican leaders also back the measure, which would push federal agencies and states to submit information on individuals' criminal histories to the FBI's National Instant Criminal Background Check System.

Democrats — as well as Trump — have said the "Fix NICS" bill doesn't go far enough. But it's not clear most Republican lawmakers are willing to embrace anything else, even as the bill faces due-process objections from some on the GOP side of the aisle.

Grassley also declined to immediately support legislation banning bump stocks. The Iowa noted the administration is moving ahead with regulatory limits on bump stocks, adding, "If that effort proves unsuccessful, I'm also willing to consider a legislative ban."

Burgess Everett contributed to this report.

Pelosi Optimistic On Gun Control Bill, But Doubts A Renewed Assault Weapons Ban Can Pass

By Sarah D. Wire

Los Angeles Times, March 1, 2018

House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi was optimistic Thursday that the Republican-controlled Congress can pass comprehensive gun legislation, but said she doesn't expect an assault weapons ban to be part of such a measure.

"It might not be [an] assault weapon ban, but practically anything short of that is what we would expect," Pelosi (D-San Francisco) said at her weekly news conference. "That might take longer. We need to have the best package we can get done now."

President Trump seemed to embrace a variety of bipartisan proposals to address gun violence at a White House meeting Wednesday, and urged Republicans to consider adding an assault weapons ban to a popular bipartisan Senate background check bill. The moment left the author of the ban, Sen. Dianne Feinstein, outwardly showing glee. She's pushed to reinstate the ban since a GOP-controlled Congress let it expire in 2004.

Even though they didn't visit President Trump at the White House to celebrate their 2017 NBA Finals win, the Golden State Warriors got a face-to-face with two California lawmakers in Washington.

House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-San Francisco), Reps. Barbara Lee (D-Oakland) and Mike Thompson (D-St. Helena) waited to congratulate the Warriors outside the locker room after their 109-101 victory over the Washington Wizards on Wednesday.

Pelosi wore her Warriors gear (a golden scarf with a map of the UC Berkeley campus) during her weekly news conference at the Capitol to celebrate the win.

President Trump on Wednesday threatened to delay building border barriers in California until his long-promised wall goes up elsewhere, seemingly slinging another arrow in his running battle with the nation's most populous state.

"Sections of the Wall that California wants built NOW will not be built until the whole Wall is approved," Trump declared in a morning message on Twitter.

For a party halfway in the grave, the news thudded like another shovelful of dirt — thwack! — heaved atop its coffin: The Republican Party may soon slip into third place among registered California voters, trailing Democrats and self-declared independents.

The decline of the GOP — now barely a quarter of the state's electorate — has been a precipitous one in this formerly deep-red redoubt, a decline all the more striking given the provenance of figures like Earl Warren, Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan. Between them, they represented

California on the national ticket in 8 out of 10 presidential races over a nearly 40-year span.

Nearly two years after California lawmakers approved a \$2-billion bond to help finance new housing for the state's homeless, not a penny has been spent, and it's unclear when any of the money will be available.

The dollars are tied up in court as a Sacramento attorney challenges the state's plan to pay off that debt with money California voters approved in 2004 for mental health services. The funding, the attorney contends, should not be diverted from treatment programs, even if the mentally ill benefit from the housing. State housing officials said they don't know how long the litigation will take to resolve.

Three months after Assemblyman Raul Bocanegra resigned amid allegations of sexual harassment, an Assembly investigation has found the Pacoima Democrat likely engaged in "unwanted conduct" toward three subordinate employees while he worked as a legislative staffer.

The investigation's conclusions, released Wednesday, back up a number of allegations first reported by the Times in November, including claims that, as chief of staff to then-Assemblyman Felipe Fuentes, Bocanegra commented on a younger staffer's appearance and asked her out on dates, and that he placed a subordinate's bracelet in his front pants pocket and asked her to retrieve it.

Sen. Dianne Feinstein shook with glee on Wednesday after President Trump suggested an assault weapons ban should be included in a bipartisan bill to expand background checks on gun sales.

The California Democrat, who became mayor of San Francisco after the shooting deaths of George Moscone and Harvey Milk in 1978, authored the original assault weapons ban in the 1990s and has been pushing to reinstate it since Congress let it expire in 2004.

Amid a nationwide reckoning over the latest mass shooting at a school, Trump said during a White House meeting with lawmakers Wednesday that he wants a comprehensive gun bill, something Congress has repeatedly struggled to get done.

Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti is not on board with high-profile state legislation designed to substantially increase new housing near transit despite pending changes intended to protect renters from displacement.

Garcetti believes Senate Bill 827 from Sen. Scott Wiener (D-San Francisco) doesn't go far enough to address concerns about housing affordability and the existing character of Los Angeles' neighborhoods.

"Mayor Garcetti appreciates Sen. Wiener's bold proposal to help address our housing crisis, and the most recent amendments are encouraging," Garcetti spokesman Alex Comisar said in a statement. "But this bill is still too blunt for our single-family home areas."

California would raise the minimum age for purchasing a rifle and other long guns from 18 to 21 under legislation proposed Wednesday in response to the recent mass shooting at a Florida high school.

The measure by state Sen. Anthony Portantino (D-La Cañada Flintridge) would also ban the purchase of more than one firearm by individuals in any 30-day period.

Portantino proposed the bill after a gunman armed with a semiautomatic rifle killed 17 people at a Parkland, Fla., high school on Feb. 14. The suspect is a 19-year-old who authorities say purchased the weapon legally.

The California Republican Party has donated \$200,000 to an initiative drive aimed at repealing recent increases to the state gas tax and vehicle fees while the campaign is still struggling to collect enough signatures to qualify a measure for the November ballot.

The infusion of cash to the group Give Voters a Voice comes as supporters of the tax increases in Senate Bill 1 released a study Wednesday that predicted the revenue generated by the levies will significantly boost the state economy.

The initiative drive has collected 550,000 of the 585,000 signatures needed to qualify a constitutional amendment that would not only repeal the taxes but require future increases to be approved by voters.

Trump To Discuss 'Violent' Video Games With Execs

By Mark Moore

New York Post, March 1, 2018

The White House on Thursday said President Trump will meet with members of the video game industry next week after he suggested the games and movies should be rated for violent content during a meeting with bipartisan lawmakers.

"The president has met with a number of stakeholders," said Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders of the gun control debate. "Next week he'll also be meeting with members of the video game industry to see what they can do on that front."

"This is going to be an ongoing process and something we don't expect to happen overnight, but something we'll continue to be engaged in," she added.

During a White House discussion on Wednesday with Democrats and Republicans to brainstorm proposals to curb gun violence after 17 people were killed on Feb. 14 at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School, Trump reacted to a question about violence movies and video games.

"The video games, the movies, the internet stuff is so violent. It's so incredible. I see it. I get to see things that you would be — you'd be amazed at," he said. "I have a young — very young son who — I look at some of the things he's

watching, and I say, 'How is that possible?' And this is what kids are watching."

He said that's another thing lawmakers should look at as they debate contributing factors to gun violence.

"You know, you rate movies for different things. Maybe you have to also rate them for terror, for what they're doing and what they're all about," he said. "It's hard to believe that, at least for a percentage of — maybe it's a small percentage of children — this doesn't have a negative impact on their thought process. These things are really violent."

Trump Wants To Arm Teachers. These Schools Already Do.

By Erica L. Green And Manny Fernandez

New York Times, March 1, 2018

SIDNEY, Ohio — The 8-by-11-inch box sits atop a bookshelf in the district headquarters, as much a part of the office furniture as the manila folders, yearbooks and Webster's dictionaries. Inside is a semiautomatic Glock handgun with extra magazines, equipment that education leaders here say will prevent this district from suffering the next schoolhouse tragedy.

Dispersed throughout the seven school buildings in this rural Ohio district outside of Dayton are dozens of biometric safes, tucked away discreetly in closets and classrooms, only accessible to a designated staff member whose fingerprint can open the box. A bulletproof vest is nearby, in an undisclosed location, fortified to protect against any bullet except one fired from an assault rifle.

"We can't stop an active shooter, but we can minimize the carnage," said John Scheu, the superintendent of Sidney City Schools.

After the latest mass shooting, at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla., last month, President Trump amplified calls to train and arm educators, roiling the teaching profession and infuriating gun control advocates who see yet another inappropriate — and potentially disastrous — duty being heaped on teachers.

For all the outcry, though, hundreds of school districts across the country, most of them small and rural, already have. Officials like those here in Sidney do not see the weaponry scattered through their schools as a political statement, but as a practical response to a potent threat.

The push for others to follow their lead has almost instantly ignited a backlash. A hashtag emerged on social media, #ArmMeWith, followed by a litany of suggestions from teachers other than guns: books, science equipment, computers and better pay. A cartoon depicting a teacher struggling underneath the weight of her responsibilities — social worker, drug detector, disciplinarian — was shared on social media more than 100,000 times.

While the president was talking up armaments and bonuses for teachers who volunteer for weapons training, dispirited educators in West Virginia walked out of their schools, seeking what they say would be simply a living wage.

"Doesn't it get to be too much?" said Brianne Solomon, a veteran West Virginia teacher who supplies food for her students' families, signs students' permission slips if parents can't and recently got one to the eye doctor. "On top of all the things we do, to have to remember when we're supposed to use a gun?"

But the Trump administration has elevated the issue to something of an educational mission. The president insisted that he personally would charge into a school, even unarmed, to challenge a shooter. Frank Brogan, a former Florida lieutenant governor who has been nominated for assistant secretary of elementary and secondary education, carries an unusual credential: When he was an assistant principal, Mr. Brogan chased down an armed teenager, talked him into lowering his weapon, then grabbed his arm and wrestled it away.

But even many educators who have faced off with a school shooter oppose the president's idea.

Every day for five-and-a-half years, Jesse Wasmer said, he has thought about the moment that he tackled a student who had just fired a shotgun into the back of a classmate in the cafeteria of a suburban Baltimore high school.

"Never have I thought, 'I wish I'd had a gun,'" Mr. Wasmer said.

Mr. Wasmer, who was a guidance counselor at Perry Hall High School when a student opened fire there in 2012, called the president's assertions "simplistic and misguided."

"I think as educators we're trained to nurture kids and foster kids, and our first instinct is to not shoot or harm them," he said. "What we need is more caring adults in these kids' lives, not more guns."

Officials here in this town of 20,000 do not swagger.

"I agree with those folks who say teachers should teach and cops should be cops, but we got a mess on our hands," said Sheriff John Lenhart of Shelby County, who gave up his National Rifle Association membership in the 1990s. "If I have to wait on state officials, on the federal government, on psychologists to figure out why people hurt one another, we would have nothing in our school system."

Since 2013, in response to the massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn., legislation in state capitals across the country has sought to arm school staff. At least 10 states allow staff members to possess or have access to a firearm on school grounds, according to an analysis by the Education Commission of the States. And local districts have varied their approach to arming educators

— in Ohio, guns are kept in safes; in Texas, they can be worn in holsters or kept in safes within immediate reach.

A Florida state legislative committee approved a \$67 million "school marshal" program this week to train and arm teachers — over the vocal opposition of Parkland residents.

In Texas, some public school systems have been quietly arming teachers and administrators for more than a decade. Teachers and other school personnel who volunteer to undergo specialized training receive approval to either carry a concealed firearm in school or have one within reach.

Lawmakers, educators and advocates for gun rights said Texas' school marshal and school guardian programs have eased fears of armed intruders and have not led to any firearm accidents or mishaps. The state's programs could serve as a model for schools around the country, advocates say.

One rural district, Harrold Independent School District, has been allowing armed personnel to carry concealed firearms on school grounds as part of its guardian program since 2007, one year after a shooting at an Amish school in Pennsylvania.

"This clearly is the solution to the problem that we're seeing around the country, and I think the president has recognized that," said State Representative Jason Villalba, a Dallas Republican who wrote the law that established the school-marshal program.

At a meeting at the White House with other governors on Monday, Gov. Greg Abbott of Texas, a Republican, told Mr. Trump that in more than 100 school districts in Texas, teachers and other personnel carry a weapon and are trained to respond to an attack.

"Candidly, some school districts, they promote it," the governor told the president. "Because they will have signs out front — a warning sign: 'Be aware, there are armed personnel on campus' — warning anybody coming on there that they — if they attempt to cause any harm, they're going to be in trouble."

In Ohio, which allows local school boards to decide who can possess or have access to firearms on school grounds, Gov. John Kasich, a Republican, also supports arming teachers.

Ohio's teachers unions have mobilized against the widespread arming of teachers in schools, arguing that gun control, not armed clashes, will protect students.

"We appreciate that there are teachers that are willing to take this extra step. It comes from a good place," said Melissa Cropper, the president of the Ohio Federation of Teachers. "But when you start thinking about all that could go wrong in that situation, there are too many risks involved."

Like many districts, Sidney City Schools was shaken by the slaughter of 20 first graders and six staff members at Sandy Hook in 2012. In the following days, Sheriff Lenhart presented Mr. Scheu with an equation: Every 17 seconds

after the first shots are fired and the first 911 call is made, somebody gets hurt or dies.

"Even in the best case scenario, we could get here in four to five minutes," Sheriff Lenhart said. "You do the math."

Within a year, Sheriff Lenhart had led what he calls a "layered" approach to school security and a "conservative" approach arming teachers in the 3,400-student school district.

The district spent about \$70,000 on safes, bulletproof vests, cameras, guns, radios and ammunition. Uniformed, armed officers cost \$200,000 a year, and an insurance policy of \$100,000 a year includes coverage for its staff with access to firearms. Those are negligible costs for a school district with a \$36 million budget, the superintendent said.

"We're buying time, and it's of the essence," Mr. Scheu said.

Windows and doors are numbered in the district's schools, and visitors have to be buzzed in. Each school has a panic button and security camera system that feeds to the sheriff's office. Every school has a uniformed, armed guard, mostly retired sheriff's deputies, every day from bell to bell. The high school has a specially trained officer and a bulletproof window between the secretary and visitors.

And if all else fails, there's a secret group of 40 educators — teachers, principals, custodians, secretaries — called a "first responder team" that can retrieve firearms in under a minute.

The team was vetted by Mr. Scheu and Sheriff Lenhart, and completed a 16-hour training course that includes firearm safety, unarmed defensive tactics and basic gunshot first aid. Its members are required to attend a concealed weapons course, as well as additional monthly trainings at either the firing range where they practice marksmanship and in school-based simulations where they practice in the hallways, identifying threats and eliminating them with air guns.

Since the team was created, it has responded to one incident, this past August when a student brought a gun to school in his backpack. It did not require a member to retrieve a gun.

The measures here met some opposition at first, from the town's teachers union and police chief, who were concerned about gun safety.

But Rick Cron, the armed guard at Sidney Middle School, said he would put members of his team up against any law enforcement officer in Ohio. The state requires that officers fire 25 bullets a year; his team members shoot at least 600.

"It's the teacher's responsibility to protect the kids, no matter what, and they do it already," Mr. Cron said, "but without the tools."

Nicki New, the parent of three students in Sidney City Schools, said she felt safer dropping off her children knowing there were staff members equipped to respond to a parent's worst nightmare.

"God forbid, if something would happen, knowing that not only a law enforcement officer is there, but there are teachers in that building who can give my child a fighting chance, is even more reassuring," Ms. New said.

Another Texas School District Arms Employees To 'Protect Our Children'

By Merrill Hope

Breitbart, March 1, 2018

A rural school district joined nearly 200 other Texas school districts in arming their employees to protect students under a "Guardian" program.

On Monday, the Fayetteville Independent School District announced its new safety plan. Signs went up that read: "Please be aware that the staff at Fayetteville ISD may be armed and will use whatever force is necessary to protect our children."

The school district, which claims less than 250 enrolled students, houses all grades K-12 on one campus. Fayetteville is situated almost halfway between Austin and Houston and is so tiny it does not have a local police force, only a county sheriff. It also does not employ school resource officers.

In a letter to Fayetteville families, Superintendent Jeff Harvey wrote that, in light of the many recent events, schools are "being forced to prepare for the unthinkable — the potential of a school shooting." Harvey cited the Parkland, Florida, massacre but also clarified their Guardian program was already in the works. In fact, Fayetteville ISD school board records show trustees discussed this issue at their January 15, 2018, meeting. They changed local board policy allowing them to implement the program.

"We have gone through this process since it became a discussion at our school board about eight-and-a-half months ago," said Harvey. He told KVUE: "We came back in January, put it up as an action item and the board agreed to unanimously begin our 'Guardian' program."

In his letter, Harvey noted that these guardians, undisclosed staff members who volunteer for the program, will have "the right to carry a concealed handgun on school grounds." He emphasized that these "hand-selected" school board approved guardians must hold a License to Carry (LTC) permit and undergo rigorous vetting. They must pass a series of requirements including police grade psychological testing, qualify annually with the specific handgun they carry, comply with and pass random drug testing, and be trained in tactics that deny intruder entry into a classroom or facility.

"So, may you carry a concealed handgun or open carry?" wrote Harvey, who made clear that other than approved guardians, Fayetteville ISD will remain a gun free zone. "No. No students, parents, nor most staff will be allowed to carry. Only those who have met all the requirements will be allowed to carry."

The superintendent also told KVUE the goal of the program was not to create vigilante teachers. He called the guardians "a protection for each and every student in this school district." Fayetteville ISD intends to utilize guardians as back up to their normal lockdown procedure. He said this will empower certain teachers and staff to fight back in a worst-case situation.

"We have numerous folks on staff that have military backgrounds," Harvey said: "Everyone here believes in that sense of protectiveness of their kids. Each one of these kids is ours. We treat them like they're our own and we want to make sure we're prepared to do whatever it takes to protect them."

Breitbart Texas reported that Harrold ISD was the state's first school district to institute the Guardian program in 2007. It permits trained and approved school personnel with a Texas Concealed Handgun License (CHL) to carry a weapon on campus to protect students. The Guardian program is authorized under Texas Government Code 411.1901. This program appeals to small, rural school districts that do not have a police force or are not close to local law enforcement. A similar Marshal plan was the result of the 2013 Protection of Texas Children Act. It allows concealed handguns on otherwise "gun free" public school campuses; however, the Marshal program does not apply to schools with less than 400 students.

KVUE spoke to several parents, all of whom agreed with arming campus guardians. One mother said: "This is the only campus. We're really small. So when we call 9-1-1...we're not going to have the law enforcement that we need here in five minutes."

Conversely, the Texas American Federation of Teachers (AFT), a chapter of the second largest teachers union in the nation, the American Federation of Teachers, opposes Guardian and Marshal programs.

Kentucky School District Votes Unanimously To Arm Teachers For School Safety

By Awr Hawkins

Breitbart, March 1, 2018

Kentucky's Pike County School Board voted to work with the Pike County Sheriff's Office to train and arm teachers for school safety.

The vote followed the January 23, 2018, shooting at Kentucky's Marshall County High School and the more recent February 14 attack on Florida's Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School.

Kentucky.com reports that vote at the school board meeting was "unanimous" in favor of armed teachers. The vote was held after hearing input from "teachers, parents and administrators."

Pike County Schools Superintendent Reed Adkins commented on the move to arm teachers, saying, "You hope you're making the right decision for kids, but I know right now something's got to be done. We may be criticized, but at the end of the day I'll take criticism to protect my students."

Pike County High School English teacher Timothy Cline concurred with decision, saying, "This is not an action to force teachers to do something they're uncomfortable with, or are unwilling to do. It's a big decision, granted, but it's one we need to make now."

Kentucky Center for School Safety executive director Jon Akers spoke against arming teachers, saying "every educational group across the country" is against arming teachers.

Illinois Century School District had a similar experience after moving to arm teachers earlier in the week. Parents and school members supported the move but state level bureaucrats opposed it. Illinois Education Association (IEA) President Kathi Griffin said, "We need to stop repeating history and tackle the school shooting epidemic head on, but arming our teachers is not the answer. Our teachers and support staff members did not sign up to carry guns! They are not law enforcement. They became teachers and support staff because they wanted to help students learn and succeed."

AWR Hawkins is an award-winning Second Amendment columnist for Breitbart News, the host of the Breitbart podcast Bullets with AWR Hawkins, and the writer/curator of Down Range with AWR Hawkins, a weekly newsletter focused on all things Second Amendment, also for Breitbart News. He is the political analyst for Armed American Radio. Follow him on Twitter: @AWRHawkins. Reach him directly at awrhawkins@breitbart.com. Sign up to get Down Range at breitbart.com/downrange.

After Taking A Risky Position On Guns, Rubio Exercises Some Caution

By Sean Sullivan

Washington Post, March 1, 2018

Eight days ago, Marco Rubio endorsed raising the age requirement for buying a rifle from 18 to 21 and voiced openness to placing limits on the size of ammunition magazines.

On Thursday, when the Republican senator from Florida unveiled his plan to address gun violence, he did not outline any specific plans on these very divisive fronts.

"We'll continue to explore and look at those," Rubio said in a speech on the Senate floor that he used to detail steps Congress should take to curtail gun violence in schools.

In an emotionally charged televised town hall last week, Rubio took a step away from the National Rifle Association and his party's orthodoxy on age requirements and high-

capacity magazines. Since that time, however, he has navigated those issues cautiously, declining to publicly champion specific legislation addressing the matters until greater consensus can be forged.

"These reforms do not enjoy the sort of widespread support in Congress that the other measures I've announced do," Rubio said Thursday. "And in order to successfully pass, these ideas will have to be crafted in a way that actually contribute to greater public safety, but also do not unnecessarily or unfairly infringe on the Second Amendment right of all law abiding adults to protect themselves and their families, to hunt or to participate in recreational shooting."

The issue of guns continues to be highly polarizing in Congress, raising questions about whether lawmakers will be able to forge the kind of agreement Rubio is looking for on matters that, in recent history, have not been fertile ground for compromise. Even after the deadly shooting at a Parkland, Fla., high school last month sparked a renewed national debate about gun laws, lawmakers have yet to pass any new regulations.

In his Thursday speech, Rubio embraced a series of other, less controversial measures. They include freeing up more federal dollars to beef up school security and create "crisis interventions teams"; creating gun violence restraining orders; pressing school districts to promptly alert law enforcement to dangerous behavior; passing a bipartisan bill to tighten the National Instant Background Check System; and mandating the FBI notify states when a prohibited person tries to buy a gun and fails the requisite background check.

The day after Rubio articulated his shift on guns in last week's CNN town hall, gun control advocates expressed some hopefulness about his stances, but they also pushed him to go further.

More recently, Rubio has attracted some criticism from those advocating tight restrictions on gun purchases. Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-D. C.) issued a statement Wednesday saying Rubio has refused her requests to withdraw a bill he sponsored that would allow an individual in the District under 21 to purchase rifles such as the one used in the Parkland shooting.

A Rubio spokeswoman told the Miami Herald that the legislation would "bring D.C. into compliance with federal law."

The senator took part in a Wednesday meeting on school safety at the White House with President Trump and other lawmakers. Afterward, he said, "We're beginning the process this week of understanding what we can get done quickly and what's going to require more time."

For Rubio, who in the past has backed away from controversial positions he has taken, most notably on immigration, time will tell whether he leans further into the risky stances he took last week or not. The past week has left that as an open question.

Marco Rubio Wants Congress To Pass GOP Approved Gun Bills

By Alex Daugherty And David Smiley

Miami Herald, March 1, 2018

In a response on the Senate floor Thursday to the deadliest high school shooting in U.S. history, Sen. Marco Rubio argued that local law enforcement and school officials could have prevented the massacre in Parkland and urged Congress to pass narrowly tailored bills on school safety and mental health that have support from both parties.

But the Florida Republican barely mentioned guns.

Rubio stopped short of endorsing a bill that would raise the minimum age to purchase a firearm, instead urging Congress to quickly pass bills related to mental health, school safety and the background check system.

"I will continue to explore additional reforms involving age limits and potentially magazine capacity," Rubio said, adding that those ideas do not enjoy enough bipartisan support to pass right now. Last week at a CNN townhall meeting televised nationally, Rubio said he would "support a law" that prevents 18-year-olds from legally purchasing guns.

Rubio criticized the response of law enforcement and school officials during his speech, arguing enough safeguards were in place before the shooting to prevent it.

"I actually believe this attack could have and should have been prevented if current law had been enforced," Rubio said.

The bills Rubio endorsed include the Stop School Violence Act, which was introduced in the House before the shooting by Florida Republican Rep. John Rutherford. The bill, which reauthorizes federal funding for the Secure Our Schools grant program, has the support of Democrats like Rep. Ted Deutch, who represents Parkland in Washington.

Other bills touted by Rubio include one that would implement gun-violence restraining orders, a bill that improves communication between school districts and local law enforcement, a bill that tweaks the federal background check system without expanding it, and a bill that would prosecute people who try to buy guns when they are barred from doing so.

He also criticized the Broward County PROMISE program, which seeks to cut down on school arrests, and argued it needs to be changed.

"While I do not support criminalizing all school conduct, students who have threatened violence and exhibited violent behavior need to be reported to law enforcement so that appropriate action can be taken," Rubio said. "Under Broward County School policies pursuant to the PROMISE program, reporting students to law enforcement is step 6 of the plan."

Rubio said Thursday that proposals to raise the age to purchase firearms and potentially limiting magazine sizes, which he has not taken a firm position on, are too hard to

pass as currently drafted in a GOP-controlled Congress. He's also against a ban on assault weapons, though he didn't talk about it in his speech.

"These reforms do not enjoy the sort of widespread support in Congress that the other measures announced today enjoy," Rubio said. "In order to successfully achieve passage of these ideas, they will need to be crafted in a way that actually contributes to greater public safety, while also not unnecessarily or unfairly infringing on the 2nd Amendment right of all law abiding adults to protect themselves, hunt or participate in recreational shooting."

FCC Chairman Declines NRA Gun Award

By Margaret Harding McGill

Politico, March 1, 2018

Republican FCC Chairman Ajit Pai on Thursday turned down an NRA gun award he received at the Conservative Political Action Conference last week, citing the advice of ethics officials at his agency.

An executive from the National Rifle Association named Pai the Charlton Heston Courage Under Fire Award recipient at CPAC for his efforts to repeal the Obama-era net neutrality rules. The award was a Kentucky handmade long gun, which the NRA said would be housed at the organization's museum until he could retrieve it.

But the FCC chairman, in letters sent Thursday to the NRA and to the American Conservative Union, which puts on the conference, noted he was "surprised" by the award and turned down the gun.

"As you know, once my staff became aware of what was happening, they asked backstage that the musket not be presented to me to ensure that this could be first discussed with and vetted by career ethics attorneys in the FCC's Office of General Counsel," Pai wrote, according to an FCC source who relayed the text of the letters.

"Therefore, upon their counsel, I must respectfully decline the award," he wrote. "I have also been advised by the FCC's career ethics attorneys that I would not be able to accept the award upon my departure from government service."

Pai, who according to the FCC has been the target of threats over his net neutrality actions, received a standing ovation when the gun award was announced. The event took place less than two weeks after the mass shooting at a high school in Parkland, Fla., which has sparked a national debate about gun control and the power of the NRA.

The chairman was scheduled to give a speech at CPAC but ended up taking part in a panel discussion with his fellow Republican FCC commissioners to discuss the agency's work.

He's been widely criticized for repealing the Obama-era net neutrality rules, which required internet service providers such as Comcast and Verizon to treat all web traffic equally.

Government ethics rules would generally prevent FCC officials from accepting awards worth more than \$200 without written clearance from their agency's ethics officials, said Larry Noble, senior director and general counsel for the Campaign Legal Center, a nonprofit organization that studies ethics rules.

Noble noted he had "serious questions" about Pai receiving the award when he learned of it.

NRA Spends Big — And Gets Its Money's Worth At Ballot Box

By James Varney

Washington Times, March 1, 2018

The National Rifle Association has become politically toxic in Washington, with even President Trump chiding lawmakers this week as afraid to buck the powerful Second Amendment rights organization.

But the true extent of the NRA's power remains a source of contention as Congress begins another gun control debate. Gun control groups, their Democratic allies in Washington and now even Mr. Trump say they must battle the group's approach.

The NRA's fabled influence has drawn criticism from both sides. Senate Minority Leader Charles E. Schumer, New York Democrat, said the organization has Republicans in a "grip lock."

Rep. Scott Taylor, Virginia Republican, said the NRA became the "boogeyman" after the killing last month of 17 people at a Parkland, Florida, high school.

"We have to elect candidates that are not funded by the NRA," Hollywood analyst Chelsea Handler tweeted. "It is disgusting how many times this has happened, and Republicans do nothing. You all have blood on your hands."

But the electoral scorecard shows that the NRA represents many people and is effective.

Measured by money and candidates, the NRA ranks among the most successful lobbying groups. Its candidates prevailed in 73.3 percent of the 2016 races where the NRA picked sides, and when judged by spending, 94.4 percent of the organization's political money supported successful candidates.

But claims about the NRA's spending often outstrip the reality.

"It's kind of hard to nail down an exact number for any of these groups," said Brendan Quinn, a spokesman at the Center for Responsive Politics that runs OpenSecrets.

In November, OpenSecrets issued a press release proclaiming that NRA spending had "surged \$100 million amidst pro-Trump push in 2016." Yet it turns out the \$100 million figure reflects the jump in the NRA's entire budget, meaning salaries, rent, cars, insurance, equipment, political campaigns — everything.

An OpenSecrets bulletin last month showed 2016 Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton collected more money from gun control groups than Mr. Trump received from gun rights groups.

The NRA concedes that it spent more than ever before on presidential and congressional races in 2016, but the final tally wasn't anything close to \$100 million, according to federal documents.

Probably the best available figure for the NRA's spending in 2016 is \$58.5 million, Mr. Quinn said. That total represents the sum of the NRA's direct contributions (\$1.1 million), lobbying (\$3.1 million), and "outside expenditures" (\$54.4 million).

That year, the biggest spending group was the liberal political action committee known as Priorities USA, with reported spending of \$133.4 million.

The NRA's political spending has always leaned conservative, but that slant has become much more pronounced since President Obama was in office. In 2010, for instance, the gun rights group had its biggest year in terms of direct contributions, doling out \$1.4 million, records show. That money was split 73 percent to 27 percent in favor of Republicans. In 2016, on the other hand, 99 percent of the NRA's \$1.1 million contributions went to Republicans.

Nor is the NRA one of the 10 biggest political donors historically. By far the biggest contributor on that table is the Service Employees International Union with \$280.2 million. Indeed, six of the 10 players on that list are unions, whose reported combined spending topped \$838 million, according to OpenSecrets.

The NRA declined to comment when asked about the perception of its spending, though it has said its effective voice in the public sphere rests on much more than mere dollar. The group declined to provide figures to support what it says has been an uptick in membership and contributions in the past two weeks.

"When people feel their constitutional rights are being jeopardized, they become active," NRA spokeswoman Jennifer Baker said.

The NRA's contention that because its members are especially politically motivated, its support matters more at the ballot box than a check does, has some empirical basis. In July, the last time the Pew Research Center took a deep dive on Americans' thinking about guns, it found that while only 30 percent reported owning guns, 75 percent of those who did saw it as "essential to their personal sense of freedom."

"What you see is there are many more people interested in protecting the Second Amendment than there are interested in destroying it," said Shawn Steele, one of California's representatives on the Republican National Committee.

The NRA's overall political spending does top gun control groups such as Everytown for Gun Safety or Giffords, two of the most prominent organizations.

Yet the numbers were flipped at the presidential level. OpenSecrets showed Mr. Trump received \$969,138 from gun rights groups, less than the \$1.1 million Mrs. Clinton received from gun control groups in the 2016 election.

Neither Everytown nor Giffords responded to requests for comment.

The NRA easily outstripped those groups in spending on lobbying — particularly last year when the NRA lobbying bill soared north of \$5 million. But the gun control advocates are far from inactive. From 2014 to 2017, Everytown spent nearly \$6 million on lobbying.

The NRA did not respond to written questions about why its lobbying total was much higher last year than it had been in any other year since at least 2007.

Giffords PAC boasted of its work on behalf of Sen. Margaret Wood Hassan, the New Hampshire Democrat who ousted incumbent Republican Kelly Ayotte in 2016. It also was active in five races last year.

Giffords has also partnered with several prominent white shoe law firms, including Covington & Burling, Arnold & Porter, Denton and others to pursue "legal strategies" and to go after gun manufacturers.

Giffords announced Feb. 20, a week after the Florida high school killings, that it would launch a six-figure ad buy against Gov. Rick Scott, a Republican who is expected to seek the state's U.S. Senate seat in November.

Georgia Lawmakers Pass Bill That Stings Delta Over N.R.A. Position

By Richard Fausset

New York Times, March 1, 2018

ATLANTA — Georgia lawmakers approved a bill on Thursday that stripped out a tax break proposal highly coveted by Delta Air Lines — the most stinging punishment that America's pro-gun forces have leveled so far on one of the many corporations recalibrating their positions on firearms after the Florida high school massacre.

The \$50 million sales tax exemption on jet fuel that was sought by Delta, one of Georgia's biggest employers, had been included in a broader tax-relief bill. But this week, a number of Georgia Republicans, including Lt. Gov. Casey Cagle, removed the perk as retribution for Delta's decision to end a promotional discount for members of the National Rifle Association.

Delta, in announcing the policy change, said it was trying to remain "neutral" in a national gun debate that has been rekindled by a gunman's attack at a school in Parkland, Fla., that left 17 people dead. A number of other major American companies, including the car rental company Hertz

and MetLife insurance, have also ended relationships with the N.R.A. since the shooting on Feb. 14.

On Thursday, the Georgia Senate overwhelmingly approved a version of the bill without the jet-fuel tax break. The House, which had already approved a version of the bill, overwhelmingly approved the change. Both houses are controlled by Republicans.

The legislation now goes to the desk of the Republican governor, Nathan Deal, who has pledged to sign it into law. But Mr. Deal is a supporter of the jet-fuel tax break, and he said that he would only sign the bill because it also included a significant reduction in personal and corporate tax rates.

Kroger: No More Gun Sales At Fred Meyer Stores Unless You're 21

By Nathan Bomey

USA Today, March 1, 2018

Kroger is banning gun sales at its Fred Meyer stores to anyone younger than 21, joining other national retailers after a 19-year-old armed with an assault-style rifle killed 17 people at a Parkland, Fla., high school last month.

The ban comes amid a recharged national debate over gun violence, which prompted Dick's Sporting Goods and Walmart to announce Wednesday that they would raise the minimum age for gun sales to 21.

Kroger said Thursday that its decision came "in response to the tragic events in Parkland and elsewhere," which prompted the company to take "a hard look at our policies and procedures for firearm sales."

Dick's also ended sales of assault-style rifles at its Field & Stream stores, after having already banned the sales at its namesake big-box locations in 2012. Walmart banned those sales in 2015.

While gun-control proponents have applauded the sales bans at big retailers, the range of outlets where guns are sold in the U.S. means that most people who want a weapon won't have any trouble finding one. In fact, any signals that weapons are becoming more difficult to buy could actually help sales, experts say.

About 6,800 shops, 56,000 federally licensed dealers and 8,000 pawnbrokers are allowed to sell guns in the U.S. Buyers can also access firearms most weekends at shows at fairgrounds and event spaces.

Fred Meyer locations, which sell general merchandise, stopped selling assault-style rifles in all states except Alaska several years ago. The company said Thursday that it would "no longer accept any special-orders of these weapons in Alaska."

Kroger itself does not sell guns at its namesake stores.

Fred Meyer has about 130 stores in Alaska, Idaho, Oregon and Washington, Idaho and Alaska.

"Recent events demonstrate the need for additional action on the part of responsible gun retailers," the company said. "As we refresh stores we are often transitioning gun departments due to softer demand and changing customer preferences.

Kroger described the changes as "common sense steps."

Former Agents Rip FBI Handling Of Tip On Parkland Shooter

By Greg Gordon And Jay Weaver

Miami Herald, March 1, 2018

It may be weeks or months before the FBI reveals exactly how it bungled ominous tips about Parkland school shooter Nikolas Cruz.

But for many former FBI agents and law enforcement experts, enough evidence has already been made public to conclude the vaunted federal agency failed at basic detective work — and in multiple ways.

The most alarming warning, for example, didn't just suggest Cruz was a likely school shooter but that he also could be influenced by the Islamic terror group ISIS, both glaring red flags for national security. But a specialist and supervisor at the FBI's civilian call center in West Virginia didn't pass the warning on to field agents in South Florida. At the very least, they might have coordinated with Broward County school and law enforcement officials to ensure that an officer knocked on the deeply troubled 19-year-old's door and possibly stopped Cruz from killing 17 people at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High.

"Oh my God!" Alfred LaManna, a retired South Florida FBI special agent, told the Miami Herald after reviewing a transcript of the tipster's early January call.

"What gets me more than anything else ... is the mere mention of ISIS and the fact that the tipster alleges his dress in one instance (is) as a potential ISIS recruit," said LaManna, who spent most of his nearly 30-year FBI career investigating organized crime. "This, alone, should have sent up a red flag to check the guy out on that matter."

Christopher Swecker, a former chief of the bureau's Criminal Division, said that based on what's known so far, the agency's call center in Clarksburg, W.Va., should be accountable for "at least professional negligence and at worst incompetence."

The ongoing and still unanswered questions about the FBI's mishandling of the Cruz case, combined with similar scrutiny into missed warning signs by the Broward Sheriff's Office, have given the National Rifle Association and other gun rights advocates fresh ammunition to push back against surging public support for tougher controls on military-style firearms, a movement led by young survivors of the Feb. 14 Parkland shooting.

"The NRA often looks for a scapegoat in mass shootings, but in this case they are accurately highlighting the failure of law enforcement," said Adam Winkler, a UCLA law school professor, who is the author of *Gunfight: The Battle over the Right to Bear Arms in America* (2011, W.W. Norton).

"The Broward Sheriff's office did an incredibly poor job following up on numerous reports of the shooter's violence and instability," Winkler said in response to emailed questions from McClatchy. "Of course, mass shootings do not typically involve a failure of law enforcement. Even if law enforcement were better, we would still have mass shootings. In this incident, it is appropriate to focus on both the failure of law enforcement and the failure of our gun laws."

The national hotline was established in 2012 by former FBI Director Robert Mueller to centralize a system in which tips went directly to agents at 56 field offices, who would then decide how to follow up.

During a briefing last week at the request of Republican Sen. Charles Grassley of Iowa, chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, the FBI disclosed that it did open a preliminary inquiry into Cruz after the tipster's Jan. 5 call and also connected that tip to a September 2017 call alerting its Mississippi field office that a Nikolas Cruz had posted the words "I am going to be a professional school shooter" on YouTube.

But, bureau officials told aides to the Iowa Republican, the FBI specialist who took the Public Access Line call and a supervisor decided not to take further action and did not share the information with the Miami field office, which would normally pass it along to local law enforcement officials in South Florida.

Grassley's committee plans to hold an oversight hearing March 14 on failures by the FBI and local law enforcement to act on credible tips about Cruz before the Parkland shooting.

A handful of former FBI agents contacted for reaction were appalled at the call center blunder. While any high-profile investigation is going to be the target of second-guessing, the handling of the Cruz tip has drawn unusually strong condemnation from the bureau's retired establishment.

"If I was in Miami and received this tip, I would have jumped all over it," said Gerard "Jerry" Forrester, another retired South Florida FBI special agent. "What struck me was the insistence of the complainant that something bad is going to happen, and she says she wants to get it off her chest."

"You can tell this lady is telling the truth. With this information, the FBI [in South Florida] would have investigated it and at least alerted the school [district] and the Broward Sheriff's Office."

The tipster, a woman, identified Cruz by his full name, his age and where he lived in her January call to the FBI tipline. She then frantically warned about his mental instability, his arsenal of firearms, his posting of assault rifles

on social media, his threats to kill himself and other people, and that "he's so into ISIS," the notorious Middle East terrorist group.

"I know he's — he's going to explode," the unidentified tipster told the civilian intake specialist at the FBI's call center, saying she feared he might shoot up a school.

Two days after the shooting spree, FBI Director Christopher Wray issued an embarrassing apology, revealing the failure and ordering the internal review on what went wrong and how to prevent similar failures in the future. In addition to that blunder, the FBI admitted that Mississippi agents failed to figure out a blogger's tip about the YouTube comment in September in which Cruz said he was going to become a "professional school shooter."

Nancy Savage, the executive director of the Society of Former Special Agents of the FBI, told the Herald that the call center's botched handling of the January call was egregious.

"Just horrendous judgment is all I can say," Savage said. "I know our members are mortified over the loss of life and the thought that the FBI might have played some part in being able to prevent that. But what actually went wrong has not been made public. I know the FBI is working to make sure they know all the particulars and will implement something so it does not happen again."

Swecker, who briefly held the FBI's No. 3 job on an acting basis before retiring in 2006, said "it's important to know what the specialist documented in the way of a summary of the call, what research ... was done by the specialist. It's hard to tell whether this was a people or process breakdown. I suspect a combination of the two."

Savage said multiple issues must be addressed to curb the seemingly endless spate of mass shootings in the United States, which stands out among developed countries for the deadly gun rampages that have killed hundreds of Americans in recent years, including massacres at the Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut, an Orlando nightclub and a concert on the Las Vegas Strip.

For example, she said even if the tip had reached the Broward Sheriff's Office, its deputies had few options. Broward Sheriff Scott Israel has repeatedly said that local law enforcement officers are "handcuffed" in such situations, referring to limitations under Florida law on their ability to hold people believed to be mentally unstable or to arrest people without enough evidence of a crime.

But a chorus of South Florida lawyers told the Herald that if county deputies had investigated Cruz before the Parkland shooting, they could have arrested him for his Instagram and YouTube postings threatening to kill classmates and shoot up a school in 2016 and 2017 while he was a student at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High.

Cruz's threats to kill fellow teens could constitute aggravated cyberstalking, a felony under state law. Most important: If Cruz had been charged with aggravated

cyberstalking, he couldn't have legally possessed the weapon he used to kill 17 people. A condition of bond for felony stalking charges in Broward is the surrender of all firearms.

Cruz's comment on the internet about wanting to become a "professional school shooter" could have been enough to charge him with a threat to injure another person under federal law.

Just horrendous judgment is all I can say. I know our members are mortified over the loss of life and the thought that the FBI might have played some part in being able to prevent that.

Nancy Savage, executive director of the Society of Former Special Agents of the FBI

Since Cruz's deadly attack, the GOP-led Florida legislative committees have moved quickly on measures to beef up funding for mental health care and school security, including arming teachers. Republican legislators also seem willing to raise from 18 to 21 the minimum age to buy a firearm and require a three-day waiting period for the bulk of gun purchases. But they refuse to consider an assault-style weapons ban sought by Democrats.

Savage, whose group takes no position on banning semi-automatic or assault weapons, said that step, or barring youths from buying any gun until they are 21, won't "solve the problems of these mass shootings" because there are other ways to obtain weapons through loopholes in the law, such as private sales with no background checks.

My initial reaction ... is that if nothing was done with the tip, considering the mention of ISIS, schools, firearms, desire to shoot people, money available to purchase guns and mental instability coming from what I surmise was a relative of Cruz, there was at least professional negligence and at worst incompetence on the part of the 'intake specialist' and his/her supervisor.

Chris Swecker, former acting FBI No. 3 official

"We can do a number of things to make our children safer and get schools that are hardened up," she said. "But you've got churches that are targets, you've got malls that are targets, you've got college campuses. You can't harden that. You get shooters up in a tower."

Winkler, the UCLA law professor, highlighted the formidable public safety challenge in a nation with over 350 million guns.

"A determined killer, like the ones in Las Vegas and Parkland, will go to great lengths to find their weapons," he wrote. "One measure that can help is a gun violence restraining order, which allows a judge to temporarily remove an unstable person's guns. Some mass shooters, like in Parkland, might have been stopped if friends and family members can seek a gun violence restraining order."

"But perhaps more importantly, we should focus our efforts on bringing down the daily death toll from gun

violence. Since the 17 died in Parkland, hundreds of Americans have died from guns."

BSO Captain Told Deputies To Set Up 'Perimeter' Around Shooting. That's Not The Training.

By Wanda J. DeMarzo And Nicholas Nehamas

Miami Herald, March 1, 2018

The Broward Sheriff's Office captain who initially took charge of the chaotic scene at a Parkland high school where 17 people were killed told deputies to form a perimeter around the deadly scene — which they did instead of going in to confront the shooter, according to a partial BSO dispatch log obtained by the Miami Herald.

Capt. Jan Jordan, commander of BSO's Parkland district, gave the order, the log shows, identifying her by her police call sign.

Broward Sheriff Scott Israel has said BSO training and nationwide active-shooter procedure call for armed law enforcement officers to confront shooters immediately rather than secure a scene.

The document raises fresh questions about the department's handling of the mass shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School on Feb. 14.

Before being appointed to command Parkland, Jordan was assigned to BSO's civil division, which serves subpoenas and injunctions, according to her online biography. She was previously with the Fort Lauderdale Police Department, where Israel also worked.

BSO did not directly dispute that Jordan issued a stand-down order. Nor did the agency confirm it.

"If detectives had answers to all of the questions, then there would be no need for an investigation," BSO spokeswoman Veda Coleman-Wright wrote in an email late Thursday night.

Israel has already publicly lambasted one deputy, Scot Peterson, who did not enter a Stoneman Douglas building where Nikolas Cruz mowed down students and staff. Three other BSO deputies were also stationed outside the school, according to CNN. Coral Springs police officers were the first law enforcement to enter the building, about four minutes after Cruz left the school, Israel said on the cable network.

Time stamps were not visible on the log of calls to BSO dispatch obtained by the Herald. But a fuller version shared earlier with Fox News shows the shooting — which lasted roughly six minutes — would have been over by the time of Jordan's order.

Cruz's gun is reported to have jammed during the shooting, causing him to flee the scene and possibly ending his deadly rampage earlier than he intended.

Still, he should have been confronted by deputies as soon as they arrived, Israel has said.

Peterson, who resigned last week but is defending his actions, was trained to have "killed the killer," Israel has said.

BSO has generally refused to answer questions about how the shooting was handled, citing an ongoing internal investigation, and is examining the conduct of its deputies and commanders. The Florida Department of Law Enforcement has also been tasked with investigating.

Israel did not return a phone call Thursday. Jordan could not be reached.

She is one of three finalists for the police chief job in Tequesta, according to the Palm Beach Post.

With Crowns On Their Heads And AR-15s In Their Arms, Couples Exchange Vows In Pro-gun Church

By Kristine Phillips

Washington Post, March 1, 2018

Dressed in wedding attire — but with crowns on their heads and assault-style rifles in their arms — dozens of couples went to a pro-gun Pennsylvania church for a commitment ceremony on Wednesday.

The couples — some of them renewing their vows while others were exchanging them for the first time — are worshipers at the World Peace and Unification Sanctuary, also known as the Sanctuary Church.

The church, in Newfoundland, Pa., is led by Hyung Jin Moon, who called on his followers to bring unloaded rifles to the ceremony.

According to the church, the rifles and the crowns (some made of bullets) are the "accoutrements of the nation of Cheon Il Guk" — the sovereign kingdom of heaven on earth, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center.

The crowns, says the church, represent the "sovereignty of Kings and Queens."

The rifles — similar to the one used in the Florida massacre — are the "rod of iron" that symbolize defending one's family and community.

So what does a mass wedding and vow-renewal ceremony with AR-15-style guns and tiaras look like?

We'll let the pictures speak for themselves:

The church, which also calls itself Rod of Iron Ministries, is an offshoot of the Unification Church, founded by Hyung Jin's father, the late Rev. Sun Myung Moon.

Sun Myung was a self-professed messiah from South Korea who became a symbol of the 1970s cult wars by holding mass weddings for couples who often were strangers, The Washington Post's Michelle Boorstein wrote.

Hyung Jin Moon has woven gun rights into the religious community he leads in Pennsylvania, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center, which calls him an "anti-LGBT cult leader."

To their followers, Sun Myung is the "True Father" and his son is the "Second King" — the True Father's anointed heir.

Wednesday's ceremony came amid a pitched debate over assault-style rifles, one of which authorities said was used to kill 17 people at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla., two weeks ago. The church ceremony raised concerns among officials of a nearby elementary school in Newfoundland, where Wallenpaupack Area School District officials decided to temporarily move students as a safety precaution, although church officials assured that the weapons were not loaded.

There's Something States Can Do About Gun Violence: 'Red-flag' Laws

Washington Post, March 1, 2018

SINCE LAST month's high school massacre in Parkland, Fla., attention has focused on lapses by the FBI, which failed to act on tips that the alleged shooter, Nikolas Cruz, posed an imminent danger. It's also the case that neighbors, teachers, classmates, acquaintances and local authorities were aware that Mr. Cruz was armed and potentially dangerous, a fact that President Trump noted the day after the killing spree. "Must always report such instances to authorities, again and again!" he tweeted.

What the president failed to mention is that state law in Florida, as in all but a handful of states, provides no legal procedure that would have allowed people close to Mr. Cruz, or even law enforcement, to ask a court to order the immediate confiscation of his weapons — even if they presented alarming evidence. As Broward County Sheriff Scott Israel told the Miami Herald, "We can't arrest for something a person is thinking about."

In fact, whether or not Congress adds muscle to gun laws — and it should, by banning military-style weapons, enacting universal background checks and raising the minimum age of firearms purchase to 21 — states need not be impotent in the face of credible threats. Five states — California, Connecticut, Indiana, Washington and Oregon — have enacted "red-flag" laws that empower relatives and close friends, as well as law enforcement officers, to ask judges to issue "gun violence restraining orders." Had such a recourse been available in Florida, it's possible that the Parkland rampage could have been averted.

Mr. Trump seemed to embrace such measures in his White House meeting with lawmakers Wednesday, even suggesting that due process could be dispensed with. (It can't and shouldn't be, of course.) Recent and repeated experience suggests it would be foolish to put much stock in the president's musings, but some states are already acting.

Lawmakers in Maryland and elsewhere have introduced red-flag legislation that would allow individuals — immediate

relatives, lovers, guardians, roommates — and law enforcement to ask courts to order temporary confiscation of a person's weapons based on credible evidence of a threat. If the petition is granted, the weapons are seized immediately, though the subject may challenge the order within a brief period — days or weeks. Typically, the order expires in a year, but it may be renewed if a judge is convinced the risk is unabated.

Mass shootings grab the headlines, but suicides may also be prevented through red-flag laws. In 2015, firearms were used in about half of 44,000 suicides in the United States. A study led by Duke University researchers found that in Connecticut, which enacted a red-flag law in 1999, the measure averted at least 70 suicides over a 14-year period.

The National Rifle Association has opposed red-flag laws even though they preserve due-process rights and address specific at-risk individuals in an evidence-based process, not gun owners as a class. The fact is that there were abundant warning signs about the perpetrators of many of America's bloodiest massacres, but no mechanism was available to act on those warnings. In the absence of previous felony convictions, adjudications of mental incapacity or domestic violence complaints, most states lack the legal means to confiscate or bar access to firearms. Parkland can be the impetus for legislation that respects the Second Amendment while safeguarding communities from the trauma of more carnage.

Trump's Chaos Theory For The Oval Office Is Taking Its Toll

By Mark Landler

New York Times, March 1, 2018

WASHINGTON — For 13 months in the Oval Office, and in an unorthodox business career before that, Donald J. Trump has thrived on chaos, using it as an organizing principle and even a management tool. Now the costs of that chaos are becoming starkly clear in the demoralized staff and policy disarray of a wayward White House.

The dysfunction was on vivid display on Thursday in the president's introduction of tariffs on steel and aluminum imports. The previous day, Mr. Trump's chief economic adviser, Gary D. Cohn, warned the chief of staff, John F. Kelly, that he might resign if the president went ahead with the plan, according to people briefed on the discussion. Mr. Cohn, a former Goldman Sachs president, had lobbied fiercely against the measures.

His threat to leave came during a tumultuous week in which Mr. Trump suffered the departure of his closest aide, Hope Hicks, and the effective demotion of his senior adviser and son-in-law, Jared Kushner, who was stripped of his top-secret security clearance. Mr. Trump was forced to deny,

through an aide, that he was about to fire his national security adviser, Lt. Gen. H. R. McMaster.

Mr. Kelly summed up the prevailing mood in the West Wing. "God punished me," he joked of his move from the Department of Homeland Security to the White House during a discussion to mark the department's 15th anniversary.

When White House aides arrived at work on Thursday, they had no clear idea of what Mr. Trump would say about trade. He had summoned steel and aluminum executives to a meeting, but when the White House said only that he would listen to their concerns, it seemed to signal that Mr. Cohn had held off the tariffs.

Yet at the end of a photo session, when a reporter asked Mr. Trump about the measures, he confirmed that the United States would announce next week that it is imposing long-term tariffs of 25 percent on steel and 10 percent on aluminum. The White House has not even completed a legal review of the measures.

Mr. Trump's off-the-cuff opening of a trade war rattled the stock market, enraged Republicans and left Mr. Cohn's future in doubt. Mr. Cohn, who almost left last year after Mr. Trump's response to a white nationalist march in Charlottesville, Va., indicated he was waiting to see whether Mr. Trump goes through with the tariffs, people familiar with his thinking said.

The chaotic rollout also reflected the departure of another White House official, Rob Porter, who as the staff secretary had a key role in keeping the paper flowing in the West Wing and who had backed Mr. Cohn in his free-trade views. Mr. Porter was forced out last month after facing accusations of spousal abuse.

It was the second day in a row that Mr. Trump blindsided Republicans and his own aides. On Wednesday, in another televised session at the White House, he embraced the stricter gun control measures backed by Democrats and urged lawmakers to revive gun-safety regulations that are opposed by the National Rifle Association and most of his party.

"I always said that it was going to take awhile for Donald Trump to adjust as president," said Christopher Ruddy, the chief executive of Newsmax Media and an old friend of the president's. In business, he said, Mr. Trump relied on a small circle of colleagues and a management style that amounted to "trial and error — the strongest survived, the weak died."

Mr. Ruddy insisted that Mr. Trump was finding his groove in the Oval Office. But his subordinates are faring less well. With an erratic boss and little in the way of a coherent legislative agenda, they are consumed by infighting, fears of their legal exposure and an ambient sense that the White House is spinning out of control.

Mr. Trump is isolated and angry, as well, according to other friends and aides, as he carries on a bitter feud with his

attorney general and watches members of his family clash with a chief of staff he recruited to restore a semblance of order — all against the darkening shadow of an investigation of his ties to Russia.

The combined effect is taking a toll.

Mr. Trump's instinct during these moments is to return to the populist themes that carried him to the White House, which is why his trade announcement is hardly surprising. Mr. Trump has few fixed views on any issue, but he has been consistent on his antipathy for free trade since the 1980s, when he took out newspaper ads warning about American deficits with Japan — a concern that has shifted to China in recent years.

"The W.T.O. has been a disaster for this country," Mr. Trump said Thursday, asserting that China's economic rise coincided with its entry into the World Trade Organization. "It has been great for China and terrible for the United States, and great for other countries."

But a president who has long tried to impose his version of reality on the world is finding the limits of that strategy. Without Mr. Porter playing a stopgap role on trade, the debate has been marked by a lack of focus on policy and planning, according to several aides.

Morale in the West Wing has sunk to a new low, these people said. In private conversations, Mr. Trump lashes out regularly at Attorney General Jeff Sessions with a vitriol that stuns members of his staff. Some longtime advisers said that Mr. Trump regards Mr. Sessions's decision to recuse himself from the Russia investigation as the "original sin," which the president thinks has left him exposed.

Mr. Trump's children, meanwhile, have grown exasperated with Mr. Kelly, seeing him as a hurdle to their father's success and as antagonistic to their continued presence, according to several people familiar with their thinking. Anthony Scaramucci, an ally of some in the Trump family, whom Mr. Kelly fired as communications director after only 11 days, intensified his criticism of the chief of staff in a series of news interviews on Wednesday and Thursday.

Yet Mr. Trump is also frustrated with Mr. Kushner, whom he now views as a liability because of his legal entanglements, the investigations of the Kushner family's real estate company and the publicity over having his security clearance downgraded, according to two people familiar with his views. In private conversations, the president vacillates between sounding regretful that Mr. Kushner is taking arrows and annoyed that he is another problem to deal with.

Privately, some aides have expressed frustration that Mr. Kushner and his wife, the president's daughter Ivanka Trump, have remained at the White House, despite Mr. Trump at times saying they never should have come to the White House and should leave. Yet aides also noted that Mr. Trump has told the couple that they should keep serving in

their roles, even as he has privately asked Mr. Kelly for his help in moving them out.

To some staff members, the chaos feels reminiscent of the earliest days of the Trump administration. Some argue Mr. Kelly should have carried out a larger staff shake-up when he came in. That has allowed several people to stagnate, particularly in policy roles, one adviser said.

White House Preparing For McMaster Exit As Early As Next Month

NBC News, March 1, 2018

WASHINGTON — The White House is preparing to replace H.R. McMaster as national security adviser as early as next month in a move orchestrated by chief of staff John Kelly and Defense Secretary James Mattis, according to five people familiar with the discussions.

The move would be the latest in a long string of staff shakeups at the White House over the past year and comes after months of strained relations between the president and McMaster.

A leading candidate to become President Donald Trump's third national security adviser is the auto industry executive Stephen Biegun, according to the officials.

Biegun, who currently serves as vice president of international governmental affairs for the Ford Motor Company, is no stranger to the White House. He served on the National Security Council staff from 2001 to 2003, including as a senior staffer for then-national security adviser Condoleezza Rice.

Rice introduced Biegun to Mattis, recommending him for a position in the administration, according to a close associate of Rice. After Mattis met with Biegun at a think tank event he was convinced Biegun would be a good fit for the national security adviser role, the associate said.

In an interview on MSNBC Thursday, Rice called McMaster "one of the best generals of his generation, he's doing a really fine job as national security adviser. I have no idea about his future in that job. I hope he stays, he's really good."

Rice called Biegun "an outstanding person. He's an expert in foreign policy and of course has spent time in the private sector and obviously he would be very, very good. But let's wait and see because H.R. McMaster is still in the job and he's doing a really fine job."

Two people close to Biegun said he would need several weeks to get his financial affairs in order to be able to join the administration this spring.

Mr. Biegun did not respond himself to a request for comment, but Ford Motor Company spokesperson Christin Baker said, "Steve has no plans to leave Ford."

"We frequently face rumor and innuendo about senior administration officials. There are no personnel

announcements at this time," White House Principal Deputy Press Secretary Raj Shah said in response.

McMaster joined the White House last year to replace Michael Flynn, who resigned after just 24 days in office amid revelations that he had lied to Vice President Pence about his dealings with Russian officials. Flynn, who was a target of the FBI's investigation into the Trump campaign and potential ties to Russia, has since pleaded guilty to perjury and is cooperating with the special counsel.

McMaster had no ties to the Trump campaign and was serving as director of the Army Capabilities Integration Center in Virginia when he was named national security adviser on Feb. 20, 2017, choosing to remain an active duty Army lieutenant general rather than retire from military service.

But his tenure has been rocky. There have been staff shake-ups, questions about McMaster's decision to voice political positions while still in uniform, and public disagreements with Trump.

Most recently, McMaster told a forum in Germany that Russian meddling in the election was "incontrovertible," a comment that drew a quick rebuke from the president.

"General McMaster forgot to say that the results of the 2016 election were not impacted or changed by the Russians and that the only Collusion was between Russia and Crooked H, the DNC and the Dems," Trump wrote on Twitter.

McMaster is a widely respected military general with a storied career.

As an Army major, he turned his Ph.D. dissertation into a best-selling book that became mandatory reading inside the halls of the Pentagon and on military bases around the world. "Dereliction of Duty" held military leaders responsible for the U.S. defeat in Vietnam, arguing that they quietly acquiesced to the demands of President Lyndon S. Johnson rather than providing their best counsel.

He earned a Silver Star as a tank commander during the Gulf War. During McMaster's promotion to lieutenant general, retired Lt. Gen. David Barno called him "the rarest of soldiers," admiring his ability to repeatedly "buck the system and survive to join its senior ranks."

McMaster took over command of U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command in 2012 and was planning to retire last summer until he got a surprise call from the White House in February 2017.

Now, a year later, a source close to Mattis said the Pentagon chief assured Kelly that he would offer McMaster a graceful landing, either another three-star job in the Army or even a promotion to a four-star general.

Defense officials would not speculate on what job McMaster could take in the Army, but two possible options are taking over for Gen. Vincent Brooks at U.S. Forces Korea or becoming the first commander of the new U.S. Army Future's Command, which will focus on modernizing the force.

Trump Calls Report Of Looming McMaster Exit 'Fake News,' Aide Says

By Cristiano Lima

Político, March 1, 2018

The Trump administration batted down a new report on Thursday that national security adviser H.R. McMaster could be on his way out, with President Donald Trump telling a spokesman for the National Security Council that the article was "fake news."

"I was just with President Trump and H.R. McMaster in the Oval Office," the spokesman, Michael Anton, said in a statement provided to pool reporters. "President Trump said that the NBC News story is 'fake news,' and told McMaster that he is doing a great job."

Raj Shah, the White House principal deputy press secretary, also cast doubt on reports of McMaster's looming departure, telling pool reporters that the administration often dealt with "rumor and innuendo about senior administration officials."

"There are no personnel announcements at this time," Shah added.

NBC News, citing five anonymous sources, reported that the White House was readying itself to replace McMaster as soon as next month. The report says the decision has been "orchestrated by chief of staff John Kelly and Defense Secretary James Mattis."

Speculation surrounding McMaster's status as national security adviser has swirled for months, with senior Trump administration officials telling POLITICO last week that Kelly and Trump contemplated firing the Army general for a few weeks in late November.

The relationship between Trump and his national security adviser — whom aides say never quite clicked with the president — was publicly tested last month when the commander in chief took issue with McMaster's saying that evidence of Russian interference in the 2016 election was "incontrovertible."

"General McMaster forgot to say that the results of the 2016 election were not impacted or changed by the Russians and that the only Collusion was between Russia and Crooked H, the DNC and the Dems," the president tweeted, referring to Hillary Clinton. "Remember the Dirty Dossier, Uranium, Speeches, Emails and the Podesta Company!"

Trump named McMaster national security adviser in February 2017, replacing Michael Flynn, who resigned after misleading Vice President Mike Pence about his communications with a Russian diplomat regarding U.S. sanctions.

Trump at the time called McMaster "a man of tremendous talent and tremendous experience" in announcing the move

White House Denies Security Adviser McMaster Is Departing

Associated Press, March 1, 2018

WASHINGTON (AP) — The White House is pushing back against an MSNBC report that President Donald Trump is planning to imminently replace National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster.

Principal deputy press secretary Raj Shah says: "We frequently face rumor and innuendo about senior administration officials. There are no personnel announcements at this time."

The MSNBC report suggests McMaster will soon be replaced by Ford executive Stephen Biegun, who served in the George W. Bush administration. It says the replacement plan was drawn up by Defense Secretary James Mattis and chief of staff John Kelly.

Trump has repeatedly clashed with McMaster, a respected three-star general, most recently over McMaster's characterization of Russian meddling in the 2016 election. Trump took to Twitter to push back against McMaster's remarks at the Munich Security Summit last month.

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Report That HR McMaster Is Being Forced Out Is 'Rumor And Innuendo'

By Diana Stancy Correll

Washington Examiner, March 1, 2018

White House principal deputy press secretary Raj Shah shot down a report that national security adviser H.R. McMaster is on his way out of the White House.

Shah said rumors often emerge about senior officials in the administration, but there are no new staffing developments to share after NBC News reported there are ongoing efforts to boot McMaster from his post.

"We frequently face rumor and innuendo about senior administration officials," Shah said in a statement. "There are no personnel announcements at this time."

The statement comes after a report was published earlier Thursday claiming the White House was planning to oust McMaster as soon as next month, a move initiated by chief of staff John Kelly and Secretary of Defense James Mattis, according to NBC News.

In the running to replace McMaster is auto industry executive Stephen Biegun, who is the vice president of international governmental affairs for the Ford Motor Company.

National Security Council spokesperson Michael Anton said President Trump has disputed the report and praised McMaster.

"I was just with President Trump and H.R. McMaster in the Oval Office," Anton said in a brief statement shared with the White House press pool. "President Trump said that the NBC News story is 'fake news,' and told McMaster that he is doing a great job."

McMaster's future at the White House has been a topic of speculation before, and some have noted he and President Trump have a rocky relationship. But in the past, McMaster has dismissed rumors that he would be departing the White House.

"I have a job. It's a tremendous honor to do this job ... and it is my intention to go as long and as hard as I can to serve the president and the nation," McMaster said in January.

McMaster was hired in 2017 after former national security adviser Michael Flynn resigned from his post after it was revealed he provided misleading information to Vice President Mike Pence about his contacts with Russian officials.

Trump And McMaster Have Seemed Anxious To Part But So Far Remain Together

By Greg Jaffe And Josh Dawsey

Washington Post, March 1, 2018

For months, the White House has been stuck when it comes to replacing H.R. McMaster, the president's national security adviser.

President Trump has often seemed eager to move on from the Army three-star general, who has struggled to bond with his irascible boss. And McMaster, who friends said has threatened to quit in fits of frustration and anger, has seemed eager to leave.

But efforts to move McMaster back to the Army have been stymied by two issues: Trump has had trouble finding a high-

quality replacement who is willing and able to take over, and it is also not clear that McMaster, still an active-duty general officer, has any place to go in the Army.

The net result is one of the weaker National Security Councils in recent memory — a critical part of the White House that has struggled at times to corral powerful personalities in the Pentagon and State Department and advance the president's often ill-defined foreign policy agenda.

McMaster has had an especially strained relationship with Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, a favorite of the president's, who has been slow to respond to McMaster's requests for military options to counter adversaries such as Iran and North Korea, officials said.

"He treats me like a three-star" rather than a coequal, McMaster has complained to colleagues of Mattis, a retired four-star Marine Corps general.

On Thursday, NBC News reported that the White House is preparing to replace McMaster as early as next month, the latest in a series of stories in recent weeks predicting the general's departure.

One long-rumored candidate to become Trump's third national security adviser is Stephen Biegun, an auto-industry executive who worked in the George W. Bush administration but is not well known in foreign policy circles, according to the officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations. Biegun, who colleagues say is a steady manager and centrist, shares the president's skepticism of big global trade deals.

White House officials insisted that no move to replace McMaster is imminent. "I was just with President Trump and H.R. McMaster in the Oval Office," said Michael Anton, a spokesman for the NSC. "President Trump said that the NBC News story is 'fake news' and told McMaster that he is doing a great job."

White House Chief of Staff John F. Kelly privately told colleagues Thursday that he did not know Biegun, who was reported by NBC to have Mattis's backing and to be a front-runner for the position.

A national security adviser's influence is often dependent on having a close relationship with the president. But few in Washington see McMaster as speaking for Trump.

In late February, McMaster said there was "incontrovertible" evidence of a Russian plot to disrupt the 2016 U.S. election. The remark drew a quick and public rebuke from the president via Twitter.

"General McMaster forgot to say that the results of the 2016 election were not impacted or changed by the Russians," Trump wrote. "The only Collusion was between Russia and Crooked H..."

It is widely known that Trump has often grown frustrated with McMaster during meetings, complaining that he drones on too long and can be too rigid in his thinking. This summer, at a low point in their relationship, McMaster entered the Oval Office only to have Trump complain that he had already seen him that day.

McMaster reminded the president that he often needed to brief him on fast-moving events.

At the time, McMaster was pushing Trump to send additional U.S. troops to Afghanistan to reverse the course of what appeared to be a losing war. In meetings on the proposed troop surge, Trump berated McMaster and even Mattis as lacking in creative thinking. After months of deliberation, he signed off on an increase.

Since then, McMaster's relationship with Trump has stabilized, even as rumors of his imminent departure have swirled.

In the White House, McMaster is credited with bringing order to a National Security Council that was overwhelmed by chaos and sinking morale after the firing of Michael Flynn,

Trump's first national security adviser. McMaster is currently overseeing some of the most sensitive issues facing the White House, such as efforts to counter Iran's expanding role in the Middle East and the administration's strategy to roll back North Korea's nuclear weapons program.

McMaster has told fellow Army officers that he is honored to work on some of the most important issues facing the country, but he can be quick to show the strains of the job. Mattis and Secretary of State Rex Tillerson often dominate meetings chaired by McMaster. In an unusual move, the three have agreed to hold only one meeting a week of the president's top national security advisers.

Barring emergencies, the agenda for the gathering must be set 72 hours in advance. The strictures have made it hard for McMaster to coordinate policy and develop options for the president, officials said.

"He often gets frustrated, goes through a phase, and his peer support group pulls him out of a funk," one senior administration official said. "I was convinced several times that this was it for his departure. Hasn't happened. I think he deep down cares too much."

Other officials said McMaster has stormed out of the West Wing or threatened to quit in front of his staff, only to calm down a few hours later.

"My personal feelings is that he's too passionate and only going if he's told to go," the official said. "At least right now."

Ideally, the White House would like to promote McMaster to a four-star position, officials said. But a senior Army official, who tracks general officer personnel moves, said he has received no indication from the White House that McMaster will be returning to the Army anytime soon.

The military typically plans four-star promotions months in advance.

Trump and other senior White House officials recognize that it would be an important milestone if McMaster were promoted to a fourth star and returned to the Army.

"Not many people have served in this administration and emerged unscathed," said a person familiar with White House deliberations regarding McMaster. "They need to show you can serve in this administration and survive."

Carol D. Leonnig contributed to this report.

White House Pushes Back On Report Of McMaster Exit

By Jordan Fabian

The Hill, March 1, 2018

The White House on Thursday pushed back on a new report that national security adviser H.R. McMaster could be replaced as soon as this month, but stopped short of issuing an outright denial.

"We frequently face rumor and innuendo about senior administration officials. There are no personnel announcements at this time," White House spokesman Raj Shah said in a statement.

NBC News reported that White House chief of staff John Kelly and Defense Secretary James Mattis are working to replace McMaster, who has frequently found himself at odds with the president.

The three-star Army general was hired last February to replace Michael Flynn, who resigned after being caught up in the Russia investigation.

McMaster is well-respected by the national security establishment in Washington but has had public disagreements with Trump over issues ranging from Iran to Russia.

The president rebuked his national security adviser last month after McMaster said Moscow's interference in the 2016 election was "incontrovertible."

"General McMaster forgot to say that the results of the 2016 election were not impacted or changed by the Russians and that the only Collusion was between Russia and Crooked H, the DNC and the Dems," Trump tweeted.

McMaster's exit would add to the cascade of staff changes at the White House, which has seen a series of departures after his first year.

In just the past 48 hours, the president lost two leading members of his press shop, including longtime adviser Hope Hicks, the White House communications director.

NBC reported that Ford Motor Company executive Stephen Biegun, who served on the National Security Council during the Bush administration, is a leading candidate to replace McMaster.

A Ford spokesperson told the network that "Steve has no plans to leave Ford."

The latest report comes one week after CNN reported McMaster, who is still on active duty, could be moved to a senior role at the Pentagon.

National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster Eyeing Exit As Trump Considers Successors

ABC News, March 1, 2018

The White House and Pentagon have been preparing for National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster to move out of his role in the administration and return with a promotion to a job in the military, sources tell ABC News.

While Lt. Gen. McMaster's departure does not appear imminent, it has been contemplated for several weeks — a transition expected possibly as soon as this spring, the sources said.

"We frequently face rumor and innuendo about senior administration officials. There are no personnel announcements at this time," deputy White House press

secretary Raj Shah told ABC News today when asked about new media reports of McMaster's coming departure.

National security adviser H.R. McMaster listens during the daily press briefing at the White House in Washington, July 31, 2017.

Last month, McMaster told reporters it is his "intention to go on as long and as hard as I can in service of the president and the nation in this job." McMaster was appointed in February 2017 after President Trump fired his first National Security Adviser Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn and faced long-running tension with President Donald Trump in part over his style and disposition in Oval Office briefings. He has also clashed with other top military brass, including Defense Secretary Jim Mattis.

The president "still has confidence in General McMaster, I spoke to him specifically about that answer," White House press secretary Sarah Sanders told reporters last week.

The Pentagon is expected to give McMaster a fourth star and new assignment yet to be determined. One post under consideration, sources say, is head of the U.S. Army's training and doctrine command headquartered in Virginia.

Andrew Harnik/AP Photo

National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster pauses while speaking to members of the media outside the West Wing of the White House, May 15, 2017, in Washington, D.C.

The president has also begun considering candidates to succeed McMaster as national security adviser, a post which does not require Senate confirmation, the sources told ABC News.

Auto industry executive Stephen Biegun, who worked on the National Security Council under Condoleezza Rice during the Bush administration, is a leading candidate to succeed McMaster, officials have told ABC News. Former Bush U.N. Ambassador John Bolton, who met with Trump at the White House late last year, is also in the running for the job.

Steve has no plans to leave Ford and has had no conversation with the White House about any positions, according to a company spokesperson.

Sarah Sanders Declines To Say If Trump Wants Jeff Sessions Gone

By Gabby Morrongiello

Washington Examiner, March 1, 2018

White House press secretary Sarah Sanders was noncommittal Thursday about whether President Trump intends to fire Attorney General Jeff Sessions, as tension between the two men reached a new level this week.

Asked whether Trump wants to get rid of his attorney general, Sanders told reporters: "Not that I know of."

"The president has made his frustrations very clear," she later added.

Trump slammed Sessions in a tweet on Wednesday for after he asked the Justice Department's Inspector General, who was appointed by President Obama, to investigate allegations of FISA abuses inside both the agency and the FBI. Several Republicans have asked Sessions to instead appoint a second special counsel to look into the accusations.

"Why is A.G. Jeff Sessions asking the Inspector General to investigate potentially massive FISA abuse. Will take forever, has no prosecutorial power and already late with reports on Comey etc," Trump wrote. "Isn't the I.G. an Obama guy? Why not use Justice Department lawyers? DISGRACEFUL!"

Sessions fired back in a statement that described his decision as being in line with "the appropriate process that will ensure complaints against [the Justice Department] will be fully and fairly acted upon if necessary." The top law enforcement official was then spotted dining Wednesday evening with his deputy Rod Rosenstein and Solicitor General Noel Francisco, a move some suggested was meant to send a message to Trump.

Sessions and Trump were both slated to attend an opioids event at the White House on Thursday afternoon.

Sarah Huckabee Sanders Just Heaped More Humiliation On Jeff Sessions

By Callum Borchers

Washington Post, March 1, 2018

Perhaps Attorney General Jeff Sessions was desensitized by President Trump's "DISGRACEFUL" tweet on Wednesday, but if he has any feelings left to hurt, then the former senator from Alabama might have been further wounded by Thursday's daily news briefing.

Asked if Trump plans to fire Sessions, White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders replied, "Not that I know of."

That is hardly an endorsement of Sessions, and it stands in stark contrast to the unequivocal "no" Sanders offered when asked whether Trump might remove his son-in-law and senior adviser, Jared Kushner.

"Jared's still a valued member of the administration, and he's going to continue to focus on the work that he's been doing," Sanders added.

The White House's message is clear: Kushner's future is safe, and Sessions's is in jeopardy. The public humiliation of the attorney general continues.

Sessions made a move Tuesday that could have pleased Trump, when he said the Justice Department's inspector general would investigate possible abuses of surveillance powers. Trump has claimed that his presidential campaign was a victim of such abuses.

But Trump was not satisfied; on Wednesday, he tweeted his frustration that Sessions had tapped the inspector general, Michael E. Horowitz, to conduct the probe. Horowitz was nominated to the U.S. Sentencing Commission by President George W. Bush but assumed his role during the Obama administration, a fact that apparently makes him suspect, in Trump's eyes.

Why is A.G. Jeff Sessions asking the Inspector General to investigate potentially massive FISA abuse. Will take forever, has no prosecutorial power and already late with reports on Comey etc. Isn't the I.G. an Obama guy? Why not use Justice Department lawyers? DISGRACEFUL!— Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) February 28, 2018

Trump has vented about Sessions before, criticizing the attorney general's decision to recuse himself from the law-enforcement investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 election. The president also seems to want Sessions to go after Trump's perceived enemies.

Attorney General Jeff Sessions has taken a VERY weak position on Hillary Clinton crimes (where are E-mails & DNC server) & Intel leakers!— Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) July 25, 2017

Why didn't A.G. Sessions replace Acting FBI Director Andrew McCabe, a Comey friend who was in charge of Clinton investigation but got...— Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) July 26, 2017

Question: If all of the Russian meddling took place during the Obama Administration, right up to January 20th, why aren't they the subject of the investigation? Why didn't Obama do something about the meddling? Why aren't Dem crimes under investigation? Ask Jeff Sessions!— Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) February 21, 2018

At one point last year, Sessions offered to resign, but Trump ultimately turned him down. It is possible Trump still does not want Sessions to leave but is trying to pressure him into doing the president's bidding.

In any case, the White House seems perfectly happy to fuel speculation about the potential firing of a man who was the first senator to back Trump and remained a loyal supporter throughout the campaign.

Ben Carson Tries To Cancel \$31,000 Dining Furniture Purchase For HUD Office

By Glenn Thrush

New York Times, March 1, 2018

WASHINGTON — Ben Carson, the secretary of housing and urban development, is attempting to cancel a \$31,000 order for a customized hardwood dining room table, chairs, sideboard and hutch the day after the chairman of the House Oversight Committee announced an investigation into the refurbishment of his HUD office.

"At the request of the secretary, the agency is working to rescind the order for the dining room set," Armstrong Williams, Mr. Carson's business manager and an informal adviser, said on Thursday.

He added, however, that "it might not be possible."

On Tuesday, Raffi Williams, a department spokesman said Mr. Carson had no problem with the order and no intention of returning the table. But early Thursday, Mr. Williams said the secretary, who was sharply criticized for the purchase at a time when his agency is facing \$6.8 billion in budget cuts requested by the White House, seemed to change his mind.

"Nobody was more surprised than me," about the order, Mr. Carson said in a statement.

But several department officials, speaking on condition of anonymity for fear of retaliation, said it would have been highly unusual for Mr. Carson not to have been told that a significant section of his office suite was about to be upgraded.

According to Mr. Williams, neither Mr. Carson nor his wife, Candy Carson, had any prior knowledge of the order, although a whistle-blower has said Mrs. Carson had pressured her to circumvent a \$5,000 statutory limit on renovation expenses.

Canceling the order for the custom-made furniture will not be easy, and it is unlikely the government will recoup all its money even if the dining room set is never delivered. It was ordered Dec. 21 from a small Baltimore company.

"He's not returning the table; he is attempting to cancel the order," Mr. Williams said. "HUD is a bureaucracy, so everything is complicated. The person they contracted has already spent \$14,000 making the table. While his intentions are to cancel it, we have to see what happens."

Representative Trey Gowdy, the South Carolina Republican who is chairman of the Oversight Committee, sent Mr. Carson's staff a three-page letter on Wednesday demanding an explanation for the purchase of the dining room set, which might have violated a federal law requiring congressional approval for any office renovation expense exceeding \$5,000.

Mr. Gowdy is also requesting a formal response to an ethics complaint to the federal Office of Special Counsel, made by HUD's former chief of administration, Helen G. Foster, the whistle-blower alleging that Mrs. Carson enlisted her help in circumventing the spending cap through an intermediary. Mrs. Foster claims she was demoted and transferred after she refused.

Mr. Gowdy asked the department to provide all emails and documents relevant to Mrs. Foster's claims and procurement of furniture and other expenses related to the redecorating of the secretary's office.

Mr. Williams denied Mrs. Foster's charges and said the secretary had spent less on sprucing up the drab, wood-paneled office than any other HUD secretary in recent history.

The investigation by Mr. Gowdy comes a month after Mr. Carson, under pressure from ethics watchdog groups, requested that the department's inspector general investigate the presence of the secretary's son, Ben Carson Jr., at HUD-sponsored meetings in Baltimore last summer.

The department's own lawyers warned Mr. Carson that the attendance of his son, a Maryland-based entrepreneur seeking to do business with the government, posed a serious potential conflict of interest.

Ben Carson Cancels Order For \$31K Dining Room Set

By Mark Moore

New York Post, March 1, 2018

Housing and Urban Development Secretary Ben Carson is canceling an order for a \$31,000 dining room set after questions were raised about a pricey redecoration of his Washington, D.C., office, according to a report on Thursday.

"I was as surprised as anyone to find out that a \$31,000 dining set had been ordered," Carson said in a statement provided to CNN. "I have requested that the order be canceled. We will find another solution for the furniture replacement."

Carson, a noted neurosurgeon before heading up HUD, said his wife, Candy Carson, had "asked if used furniture was an option."

"My wife also looked at catalogs and wanted to be sure that the color of the chair fabric of any set that was chosen matched the rest of the decor," he said in the statement. "I made it known that I was not happy about the prices being charged and that my preference would be to find something more reasonable."

The dining room set for his personal office at HUD headquarters included a mahogany table, sideboard, breakfront and 10 chairs with a blue velvet finish, CNN reported.

Evelyn Sebree, the owner of Sebree and Associates, the interior design firm that sold the dining room set to HUD, said she worked with agency officials to find something "traditional."

"They said they were looking for dining furniture for the secretary's office because a new secretary was coming in and the current furniture was old and it was raggedy," Sebree told CNN.

The set wasn't expected to be delivered to HUD until May, when Sebree said she would have been paid.

Republican Rep. Trey Gowdy, the chair of the House Oversight Committee, has asked HUD to provide records for the office furnishings since 2017.

And a senior HUD official said she filed a complaint with a government watchdog agency after she was demoted and replaced by a President Trump appointee after she balked at the price of a \$5,000 chair for Carson's office.

Helen Foster, 47, said in the November complaint that she was told "\$5,000 will not even buy a decent chair."

Did HUD Really Need To Spend \$31,000 Of Taxpayer Money On That Dining Furniture For Ben Carson?

By Kevin McCoy

USA Today, March 1, 2018

Let's say you're a Trump administration official with old dining room furniture in your Washington, D.C. executive suite. What do you do?

In the case of Ben Carson, the presidential cabinet secretary who heads the Department of Housing and Urban Development, his staff declared the circa 1967 dining set was beyond repair and spent \$31,561 on a custom hardwood table, chairs, and a hutch to replace it.

A federal law limits spending for redecorating or refurbishing to \$5,000 unless Congress approves more. However, whistleblower complaints filed by Helen Foster, a high-ranking HUD civil servant, allege that a top official repeatedly told Foster to "find money," for the purchase.

More: Ben Carson's HUD spent \$31,000 on dining room furniture for his office

Foster's complaints charge that Carson's wife, Candy, wanted to help redecorate the office suite. Foster was demoted in reprisal after she raised questions about the work and other HUD spending, the complaints allege.

The allegations make Carson the latest Trump cabinet members to face questions about spending issues.

HUD declined to comment on Foster's complaints. Raphael Williams, the housing agency's communications director, said in a Thursday email that HUD "is working to rescind the order for the dining room set," at Carson's request.

The announcement came a day after Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, a government watchdog organization, asked HUD Inspector General Helen Albert to investigate Foster's allegations.

Could Carson and HUD have gotten a better deal for American taxpayers by shopping around?

Although a furniture trade industry spokeswoman suggested the cost of the controversial dining set actually might be reasonable, USA TODAY online comparison shopping identified less-pricey options.

On the higher end, the website of Raymour & Flanigan, a furniture chain with stores in seven Northeast states, lists a 98-inch, cherry-colored dining table with a double pedestal for \$3,379. The company also sells matching armchairs for

\$759.95 each. A 92-inch-high china cabinet for \$5,869 would complete the set.

According to the furniture company website, the price tag for the table, eight chairs and the hutch, without tax or delivery charges, totals \$15,329, or less than half the cost of Carson's HUD dining set.

Still too expensive?

Carson and HUD potentially could have settled on a more affordable option from American Signature, a furniture company with stores in 17 states. The firm's website features a charcoal-colored dining table with two pedestals and matching upholstered side chairs.

Combined with a combination buffet and hutch, the table and eight chairs would cost approximately \$2,708, without tax or delivery charges, the company website shows. The total potentially would comply with the federal spending limit on redecorations.

The \$31,500 HUD cost could be justified if the dining set were made of solid wood or hand-constructed veneer and featured solid brass hardware, said Jackie Hirschhaut, a spokeswoman for the American Home Furnishings Alliance, a trade group for the residential furniture industry.

"Consumers might be outraged at the concept of spending \$31,500," said Hirschhaut, but "this furniture will last 50-plus years of daily, rugged use."

That said, at least one decorating expert suggested HUD need not spend so much.

Charles Krewson, a Washington, D.C.-based interior decorator, said his first recommendation would be to explore refinishing of the existing HUD dining set. "A clever refinisher can really transform things, and so can a good upholsterer," he said.

But in some cases, salvaging would be difficult, Krewson said.

"Usually people of means in a situation like that actually pay for it themselves, that's what I've had happen in the past," he said. "Someone who's an honorary ambassador or something like that, they usually pick up a lot of the tab and just improve things."

Carson isn't the first Trump appointee whose spending has raised questions.

Health and Human Services Secretary Tom Price resigned in September amid reports that he ran up roughly \$1 million in flight costs on private and military aircraft.

Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin requested a U.S. Air Force jet to fly him and his new wife, Louise Linton, to France, Italy, and Scotland for their summer 2017 honeymoon, ABC News reported.

Mnuchin later decided the request was unnecessary because he could arrange secure communications during the trip without a military jet.

Separately, the Treasury inspector general's office said it would review the trip Linton and his wife took to the U.S.

Bullion Depository in Kentucky at the time of the August 2017 solar eclipse.

Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin improperly accepted Wimbledon tickets and airfare for his wife during a European trip last summer that cost taxpayers more than \$122,000, a VA inspector general report concluded in February.

EPA Chief May Forgo 1st Class Flights Amid Growing Scrutiny

By Michael Biesecker

Associated Press, March 1, 2018

WASHINGTON (AP) — The head of the Environmental Protection Agency says he may start flying in coach amid increasing scrutiny of claims that he needs to fly first class because of security concerns.

EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt said in an interview with CBS News on Wednesday he had instructed his staff to make changes that could include flying coach.

"What I've told them going forward is this: There is a change occurring, you're going to accommodate the security threats as they exist, you're going to accommodate those in all ways, alternate ways, up to and including flying coach, and that is what's going to happen on my very next flight," Pruitt said. "So those things are happening right away."

That's a significant shift since last month, when Pruitt said in interviews that his chief of staff and security team had determined he should fly in premium class seats following some unpleasant interactions with other passengers.

Asked what had changed in the assessment of what was needed to keep Pruitt safe, EPA spokesman Jahan Wilcox referred back to Pruitt's CBS interview and declined to provide any additional context or comment.

Since taking office last year, Pruitt has been unusually secretive about his frequent air travel. In a break from his predecessors, Pruitt's office consistently refuses to provide advance public notice of his trips, typically releasing a schedule of his meetings and appearances only after they have occurred.

Following recent media reports about Pruitt's pricey airfare, the Republican-led House Oversight committee last week demanded copies of his travel records to be provided by March 6. EPA's inspector general is also auditing Pruitt's 2017 travel costs.

Federal regulations allow government travelers to fly business class or first class when no cheaper options are "reasonably available" or if there are exceptional security circumstances. Wilcox told reporters last month that Pruitt had obtained a "blanket waiver" allowing him to take premium flights. Such a blanket waivers are also barred under federal rules, however, and Wilcox later said Pruitt was granted separate waivers by ethics officials for each flight.

EPA has declined to provide any public explanation of its evolving account and has thus far refused to release copies of the waivers allowing Pruitt to fly first class.

The Associated Press is among several organizations that has sought a full accounting of Pruitt's travel and security expenses under the Freedom of Information Act. Though some records were released following lawsuits filed against the agency, EPA has so far refused to say how much public money has been spent for Pruitt and his staff to travel across the country and on international trips.

The limited records that have been provided show Pruitt's airfare is often several times more expensive than that of aides booked on the same flights. Often, those trips have included weekend-long layovers in Pruitt's home state of Oklahoma.

Last month, Pruitt said there were some "incidents" on flights that prompted his need for first-class seats. EPA has refused requests from AP to provide any details about those incidents.

Pruitt is the first EPA administrator to require around-the-clock protection from an armed security detail. He has also taken other security precautions, including the addition of a \$25,000 soundproof "privacy booth" inside his office to prevent eavesdropping on his phone calls and spending \$3,000 to have his office swept for hidden listening devices.

Follow AP environmental writer Michael Biesecker at <http://Twitter.com/mbieseck>

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Scott Pruitt: "My Very Next Flight" Will Be Coach

By Katiana Krawchenko

CBS News, February 28, 2018

Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt told CBS News chief White House correspondent Major Garrett there is a "change coming" in his security, which he claimed was the reason behind his controversial expensive travel. Pruitt told Garrett in the latest edition of CBS News' "The Takeout" podcast that he had been flying coach until receiving "unprecedented" threats, which led to a "threat assessment."

"There's a change coming, because look the security threat matters," Pruitt said. "What I've told them going forward is this: There is a change occurring, you're going to accommodate the security threats as they exist, you're going to accommodate those in all ways, alternate ways, up to and including flying coach, and that is what's going to happen on my very next flight. So those things are happening right away."

Earlier this week, House Oversight Chairman Trey Gowdy issued a letter to Pruitt demanding records related to his taxpayer-funded travel. Pruitt has said security concerns were raised after unpleasant interactions with other passengers.

Sources have told CBS News that Pruitt regularly flies in first class along with his unprecedented, round-the-clock, security detail.

On a return flight from Milan on June 11, Pruitt flew on Emirates Airlines, CBS News' Julianna Goldman reported earlier this month. Emirates Airlines' business class cabins are some of the world's most luxurious, complete with an onboard lounge that promises what the airline calls a "truly unique journey."

Pruitt needed special dispensation to take the flight. Government officials are bound by the Fly America Act, which requires them to "use U.S. air carrier service for all air travel ... funded by the U.S. government."

The entire trip cost more than \$43,000, according to travel vouchers obtained by the Environmental Integrity Project. To make his departing flight to Rome on June 7, Pruitt flew on a military aircraft from Cincinnati, where he had attended a rally with the president.

Pruitt insisted to Garrett there is a "legitimate security issue," saying the "threats I have faced are unprecedented." Pruitt said there had been four to five times the amount of threats against him than against the last EPA administrator. Pruitt said he was flying coach until a threat assessment.

"There have been incidents in airports and those incidents you know occurred and they are of different types, but here what I really wanted to try to convey to you is that these threats have been unprecedented from the very beginning and that the quantity and type are unprecedented," Pruitt said. "You're gonna accommodate security threats as they exist, up to and including flying coach."

Pruitt called outgoing communications director Hope Hicks a "wonderful individual" and a "tremendous asset" to the administration. He also called White House chief of staff John Kelly a "tremendous leader" and said he has made a "tremendous difference." As for the White House's handling of spousal abuse charges against former White House staff secretary Rob Porter, Pruitt said "those kinds of matters I don't follow as closely as you might think. John [Kelly] is someone who does things the right way."

Pruitt Says He Will Start Flying Coach

By Alex Guillén And Emily Holden

Politico, March 1, 2018

EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt will start flying coach instead of first class at least part of the time, he told CBS News' Major Garrett Wednesday.

Pruitt had been flying first or business class consistently because his security detail was alarmed by hostile encounters while traveling, as POLITICO reported last month.

But the pricey flights have attracted significant criticism and scrutiny, including a request for information from Rep. Trey Gowdy, the South Carolina Republican who chairs the House Oversight Committee. During one stretch of travel in early June, Pruitt and his staffers spent \$90,000, The Washington Post reported.

EPA initially claimed Pruitt had a "blanket waiver" to fly first class, an arrangement that would appear to violate federal law. Staffers later said that Pruitt cites security concerns when asking for approval for the more expensive tickets for each trip.

Pruitt on Wednesday said he has instructed his security detail "to accommodate those security threats in alternate ways, including—up to and including, flying coach going forward," according to an excerpt of the interview released last night.

Pruitt said he would fly coach "on my very next flight." It's not clear what other "alternative" security measures are available while flying coach. The full Pruitt interview will be released on "The Takeout" podcast on Friday.

U.S. Ambassador To Mexico To Quit Amid Tense Relations Under Trump

By Azam Ahmed

New York Times, March 1, 2018

MEXICO CITY — The United States ambassador to Mexico plans to resign from her post in May, according to a memo circulated on Thursday to embassy staff, the latest in a string of senior diplomatic departures from the region — and more broadly from the State Department.

The ambassador, Roberta S. Jacobson, 57, served just under two years in the post, after her arrival was delayed by a prolonged confirmation process. Analysts say her departure will be deeply felt by both American and Mexican officials — she was one of the most experienced Latin America experts in the State Department, having spent most of her 31 years there focusing on the region.

"I have come to the difficult decision that it is the right time to move on to new challenges and adventures," Mrs. Jacobson wrote in her letter. "This decision is all the more difficult because of my profound belief in the importance of the U.S.-Mexico relationship and knowledge that it is at a crucial moment."

The Trump administration has selected a nominee to fill Mrs. Jacobson's vacancy, but has not yet released the name, according to an American official with knowledge of the decision who was not authorized to comment publicly and who discussed the matter on the condition of anonymity.

Mrs. Jacobson leaves at a tense moment in relations between Mexico and the United States, with President Trump vowing to have Mexico pay to build a wall between the countries, pledging to tear up the North American Free Trade Agreement and promising to deport millions of Mexicans who crossed the border illegally.

There was also a testy phone call between Mr. Trump and President Enrique Peña Nieto of Mexico that derailed tentative plans for the two leaders to meet after Mr. Trump refused to drop his demand that Mexico pay for the border wall.

For Mrs. Jacobson, the ambassadorial post was the culmination of a career largely centered in Washington, where she was most recently the assistant secretary for Western Hemisphere affairs. As a member of the State Department's Civil Service — as opposed to the foreign service, which typically fills the ranks of diplomats — it was highly unusual for Mrs. Jacobson to have ascended to the top slot in Mexico.

But Mrs. Jacobson's supporters say her extensive experience and connections in the country were crucial assets for Washington at a time of strain between the two neighbors, which have closely intertwined economies.

Former President Barack Obama named Mrs. Jacobson to the post in 2015, but a bitter partisan dispute in Congress meant nearly 11 months elapsed before she was confirmed. After she arrived in Mexico City, the honeymoon period did not last long.

Mr. Trump's election abruptly changed the generally warm relations that the United States had developed with Mexico over the last 25 years — ones that Mrs. Jacobson had helped foster through much of her career. Mrs. Jacobson was left working with her Mexican counterparts to assuage growing concern — and anger — at the new president's tough talk.

At the same time, diplomacy on Mexico was being routed through the White House, via the president's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, which left Mrs. Jacobson with less authority.

Officials in Mexico, as well as former colleagues, lamented her departure, calling it the latest blow to strained Mexican-American relations.

"No career official has more consummately understood U.S.-Mexico relations," said Carlos Pascual, a former American ambassador to Mexico and Ukraine. "She grounded American policy in the belief that, as neighbors, the U.S. and Mexico will gain most from using the vast resources of both countries to confront shared problems together."

Mrs. Jacobson will be leaving a State Department that has seen an exodus of foreign service officers.

Among those leaving are several high-ranking officials with deep experience in Latin America, including Thomas A. Shannon Jr., the third-highest ranking official in the State

Department. Mr. Shannon, the under secretary of state for political affairs who previously served as an ambassador to Brazil, Guatemala and Venezuela, announced his retirement last month.

While Mr. Shannon said his decision had been made for personal reasons, the departure of another official, John Feeley, the ambassador to Panama, was more politically tinged. In his resignation letter this year, Mr. Feeley said he was leaving a long career in the government service because he felt he could no longer serve Mr. Trump.

In her letter to staff, Mrs. Jacobson focused mostly on the work she and her team had done during her tenure, and did not take any shots at the president.

"You have respected everyone you came in contact with — Mexican, American, or from anywhere else, reflecting the better angels of our nature," she wrote. "You know how great our two countries are. And that we are stronger together."

Mrs. Jacobson began her career at the State Department as a White House management fellow in 1986, during the Reagan administration, after graduating from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University. Three years later she was transferred to the Western Hemisphere sector, where she remained for practically the rest of her career.

Her interest in the area stemmed from the embrace of democracy that spread through the region in the 1980s, just as she was leaving college.

She served in numerous roles in Washington, including as deputy secretary for Western Hemisphere affairs for five years before she moved to Mexico, where she was a key broker in the agreement to re-establish relations between Cuba and the United States during the Obama administration.

A Trump Ally Is Likely To Replace A Career Diplomat As U.S. Ambassador, And Mexicans Are Worried

By Joshua Partlow And Philip Rucker

Washington Post, March 1, 2018

MEXICO CITY — The U.S. ambassador to Mexico, Roberta S. Jacobson, plans to leave her post this spring, a move that could further strain a rapidly deteriorating relationship between the two countries at a time of major negotiations on trade, a controversial border wall project and an upcoming presidential election in Mexico.

An experienced diplomat and Latin America expert, Jacobson is the latest of several high-level officials at the State Department to part ways with the Trump administration. In a letter to embassy staffers Thursday, Jacobson did not focus on her personal reasons for her resignation, effective in May. She described it as a "difficult decision" but said it was

"the right time to move on to new challenges and adventures."

Jacobson took up the post in 2016. Her departure was first reported by the New York Times.

As her replacement, the Trump administration is looking to name Edward Whitacre Jr., a former chief executive of General Motors and AT&T, who also has worked with Carlos Slim, Mexico's richest man, according to U.S. and Mexican officials familiar with the decision. Whitacre's name was first reported by the Mexican newspaper Reforma. White House officials did not respond to a request for comment.

Whitacre, a Texas native, has been president of the Boy Scouts of America and a board member of ExxonMobil, which probably put him in contact with Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, also a past president of the Boy Scouts and a former Exxon chief executive. A call to Whitacre was not immediately returned.

Whitacre will enter a fraught relationship between the United States and Mexico. Last month, President Trump and President Enrique Peña Nieto held a troubled phone call in which the two disagreed about Trump's proposed border wall. Peña Nieto called off a planned trip to Washington after the conversation, the second time during Trump's tenure that such a visit has been canceled. Meanwhile, months of talks to overhaul the North American Free Trade Agreement have yet to yield a resolution.

If the new U.S. ambassador pushes harder on Trump's favorite themes — including stopping illegal immigration from Central America — the relationship could deteriorate further, according to Mexican analysts.

"This will become a more complicated relationship with the new ambassador," said Jorge Chabat, a professor at CIDE, a research institution in Mexico City.

Jacobson, who grew up in Englewood Cliffs, N.J., and entered the State Department in 1986, during the Reagan administration, has brought a wealth of Latin America expertise to the position of ambassador. She is widely liked by Mexican officials, who often describe her as trying to preserve the productive relationship that existed during the Obama administration.

"We Mexicans will miss Roberta," said Rafael Fernández de Castro, director of the Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies at the University of California at San Diego. "She did a wonderful job keeping communication channels open with her Mexican counterparts as President Trump both weakened the State Department and bashed Mexico. She was a blessing when the U.S.-Mexico relationship most needed it."

Jacobson has spent most of her State Department career in the Western Hemisphere section, including as assistant secretary of state for Western Hemisphere affairs and several other high-level positions.

State Department Undersecretary Steven I. Goldstein confirmed that Jacobson has announced her intention to retire and had told Tillerson when he was in Mexico last month. "We are grateful to her, and we are sorry to see her go," Goldstein said.

Many observers expected Trump would replace Jacobson at some point and bring in someone who more closely shares his views.

Other Latin America experts, such as the U.S. ambassador to Panama, John D. Feeley, also have announced their intention to leave their posts.

Jacobson mostly highlighted the work of her subordinates.

"We have ensured criminals who prey on the most vulnerable faced justice, that women and children trafficked like merchandise were freed, that migrants knew their rights, that dangerous drugs were removed from the marketplace and reach of our children, that democracy was strengthened, and the judicial playing field leveled where we could," she wrote. "We have worked for American and Mexican prosperity, promoted exports from the United States and literally hundreds of U.S. companies, and help generate good jobs that bring with them dignity."

Anne Gearan in Washington and Gabriela Martinez in Mexico City contributed to this report.

U.S. Ambassador To Mexico To Resign Amid Tense Bilateral Relations

Reuters, March 1, 2018

Full-text stories from Reuters currently cannot be included in this document. You may, however, click the link above to access the story.

U.S. Ambassador To Mexico Stepping Down

The Mexican news organization Reforma has reported that the White House may nominate Ed Whitacre, the former CEO of General Motors and AT&T, to replace Roberta Jacobson.

By Nahal Toosi

Politico, March 1, 2018

The U.S. ambassador to Mexico, Roberta Jacobson, is resigning from the post, the latest in a string of high-profile departures from the State Department and one that could further complicate the U.S.-Mexico relationship amid lingering tensions over immigration, trade and other sensitive subjects.

In a memo sent to her staff and obtained by POLITICO, Jacobson wrote that her decision to leave, effective May 5, was "difficult," and she acknowledged that it comes at a "crucial moment." But she didn't say why exactly she'd decided to quit despite those things.

As an example of how acrimonious ties have become: Just recently, Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto scrapped a planned visit to the United States, reportedly after

a tense phone call with President Donald Trump in which the U.S. leader refused to publicly affirm Mexico's position that it would not pay for a border wall.

The Trump administration is considering replacing Jacobson, an appointee of former President Barack Obama. The Mexican news organization Reforma has reported that Ed Whitacre, the former CEO of General Motors and AT&T, is the expected nominee, but the administration has not made an official announcement about its choice. The New York Times first reported Jacobson's plan to leave.

In her memo, Jacobson praised the work of the people at the U.S. mission in Mexico, but said that after 31 years of government service, "it is the right time to move on to new challenges and adventures."

"This decision is all the more difficult because of my profound belief in the importance of the U.S.-Mexico relationship and knowledge that it is at a crucial moment," she wrote. "One of the things that makes it easier is knowing that all of you will continue to do your usual outstanding work in ensuring that the relationship grows and prospers."

She also noted the importance of maintaining a good relationship between the two neighboring countries, a possible allusion to the unhealthy status quo. "You have respected everyone you came in contact with — Mexican, American, or from anywhere else, reflecting the better angels of our nature," Jacobson wrote to the staff. "You know how great our two countries are. And that we are stronger together."

Jacobson is highly regarded in Mexico and in U.S. diplomatic circles. She has been a career Civil Service officer, which made her road to an ambassadorship rather unusual. Such posts, when not given to outside political hires as a perk of supporting a presidential campaign, typically go to career Foreign Service officers.

Mexico is considered a very important ambassadorship because the country is one of America's largest trading partners. Because of Trump's particularly nasty relationship with the Mexican leadership, confirmation hearings for an incoming U.S. ambassador to Mexico could be very contentious.

Jacobson's own wait for confirmation as ambassador was held up for months by lawmakers unhappy with the Obama administration's decision to resume diplomatic ties with Cuba. She was confirmed in April 2016. As a former assistant secretary of state for Western Hemisphere affairs, Jacobson played a major role in the Cuba-U.S. rapprochement.

Trump has demanded a wall be built along the U.S.-Mexico border to keep out illegal immigrants and that Mexico pay for it. His administration is also engaged in talks to renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement, a pact that Trump repeatedly slammed on the campaign trail —

during which he also described undocumented Mexican migrants as potential criminals and rapists.

Jacobson is one of several high-profile State Department officials to announce their decision to leave in recent months. Earlier this week, Joseph Yun, the special envoy for North Korean issues, announced his imminent retirement. Thomas Shannon, the undersecretary of state for political affairs, has also said he will step down once his replacement is ready.

Jacobson's departure will increase concerns among U.S. lawmakers and others that the State Department is being gutted under Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, who has failed to fill numerous leadership positions in his 13 months at the helm and also sought to trim staff.

U.S.-Mexico Ties Are Strained, But That Isn't Stopping The U.S. From Building A Giant New Embassy

By Joshua Partlow

Washington Post, March 1, 2018

MEXICO CITY – One day last month, the presidents of the United States and Mexico held an angry phone call that scuttled a planned meeting between the two leaders. Three days later, President Trump threatened in a tweet that Mexico "must help MORE" to stop Central American gangsters coming to the United States.

Bitter disputes continue about the border wall and who will pay for it; about the how to remake the North American Free Trade Agreement; and about possible deportations of Mexicans from the United States.

And yet the United States and Mexico also last month drank champagne toasts to their relationship and the start of construction on a giant, new, nearly \$1 billion embassy building, with the outgoing U.S. ambassador, Roberta Jacobson, raising her glass "to the next 100 years or more."

"Our bilateral relationship has grown, diversified and accelerated, making it high time for us to trade in for a larger, modern and gorgeous new model," Jacobson told the crowd at the groundbreaking.

Despite the Trump-era tensions, the diplomatic work between the two countries remains robust. The U.S. Embassy houses some 1,200 to 1,400 diplomats, among the largest American missions in the world, according to U.S. officials. In addition, more than 1,000 other diplomats are posted around Mexico at nine consulates.

To some degree, the strain created by Trump's criticism of Mexico is counter-balanced by these extensive diplomatic and citizen ties. The two countries are among one other's top trading partners. Millions of Americans visit Mexico each year as tourists, and thousands of U.S. companies operate there.

The current embassy has been located since the mid-1960s along Reforma avenue, one of the city's main arteries

and a favorite site for protests and marches. While centrally located, it has grown crowded over the years. Not only does it accommodate staff from many different agencies, including large contingents from the departments of Justice, Defense and Homeland Security, it grew steadily during the Obama administration. Reports from the State Department inspector general in 2009 and 2015 showed that total U.S. personnel in Mexico grew from 2,162 to 2,704 over that period.

"The embassy had simply become too small," said Carlos Pascual, the U.S. ambassador from 2009-2011 who began the search for a site for a new compound that would provide more room. Better security was also a factor. While it is centrally located, the current building has no setback and looming directly over the street – in contravention of requirements for embassies built in the war-on-terror era.

Finding a big enough swath of land for a new building was not an easy task in this teeming capital; Jacobson called it "harder than crossing the city during rush hour in the rain."

Many embassies have been moving to peripheral parts of town, but Pascual wanted to find something central "in order for people in the embassy to have access to their counterparts in government and business."

The 8.5-acre site that was eventually found is about three miles northwest of the current embassy. The U.S. government arranged to purchase the land in 2011 from Colgate-Palmolive, which had a factory there for years.

The chemical pollutants left by the factory led to years of delays as Colgate-Palmolive cleaned up the site, and the expected cost of the project jumped by hundreds of millions of dollars.

"It's a bit of a fiasco," Rep. Jason Chaffetz (R-Ut) told CBS News in 2015. "I'm not going to step in there with the dirt with all [those] toxins in it."

Last week, Mexico's richest man, Carlos Slim, who owns swaths of the neighborhood, the city's mayor, Miguel Angel Mancera, Jacobson and several other officials and diplomats all happily tromped in that dirt for the groundbreaking ceremony.

Despite the lingering tensions, the Mexican officials struck a mostly positive note. Carlos Manuel Sada, the top official for North America at Mexico's Foreign Ministry, called the relationship "highly dynamic, which frequently presents us challenges, but also multiple agreements and opportunities." Interior Minister Alfonso Navarrete Prida described the United States and Mexico as "two nations with strong bonds and with enormous challenges" but added that, ultimately, "our house is also your house."

Still, Jacobson's planned departure adds further uncertainty to the relationship. A longtime diplomat and Latin America expert, she is widely liked by Mexican officials, who have expressed worry that Trump might bring in a more combative envoy.

At the groundbreaking, a white tent was erected in the middle of the dirt expanse and servants in white gloves circulated with trays of champagne. The U.S. and Mexican officials hoisted gold-colored shovels wrapped in their respective flags to pitch the first piles of soil.

The project is expected to cost \$943 million, according to the State Department.

The U.S. government completed the purchase from Colgate-Palmolive in 2016 and awarded the design contract to a joint venture between two New York-based architecture firms, Tod Williams Billie Tsien and Davis Brody Bond. An Alabama-based firm, Caddell Construction, was awarded the construction contract last year. Caddell has also built two of the eight prototypes for Trump's border wall in San Diego.

One of Caddell's representatives, Rod Ceasar, vice president for international operations, surveyed the dusty vacant lot last week with satisfaction.

"It's nice," he said. "It's flat. It's not wet."

"We're getting ready to start a big hole in the ground," he said. "We're excited about that."

On the streets around the site, not everyone is so thrilled. Humberto Nuñez, a mechanic, has watched with some concern the changes in his neighborhood, including the gradual departure of factories that made shampoo, screws and windows.

He's heard how eager developers are referring to the area, Colonia Irrigacion, by a new name – Nuevo Polanco, after the famously swanky enclave to the south. The gentrifying creep has brought rising rents and more traffic.

"This neighborhood has changed radically in the last three or four years," said Nuñez, 50. "With the embassy, it will change even more."

Some neighbors say they are afraid they might be priced out when U.S. diplomats descend. The sour view that many Mexicans have of Trump has not helped the mood. In Trump's first year, Mexico has ridden a currency roller coaster, with the peso fluctuating according to news of the NAFTA negotiations and other factors.

"Whatever he says changes the value of the peso and generates uncertainty," Nuñez said. "You can't denigrate and insult people like this."

The embassy is expected to be completed in 2022.

"I hope they don't finish it until 2030. Maybe I'll be retired," said Valentin Lopez, 58, a carpenter who was building a desk inside his shop on Presa Las Virgenes street, along the southern edge of the construction site. "It's a bad idea for me. It might drive me away."

Trump Says Administration Working On 'Very Very Strong' Policies To Combat Opioids

By Tamara Keith And Brian Naylor

NPR, March 1, 2018

The White House convened a summit on the opioid epidemic Thursday, where first lady Melania Trump said she is proud of the what the administration has already accomplished on the issue, but that "we all know there is much work still to be done."

Although he had not been expected to participate, President Trump briefly joined the event.

After introducing a personal friend who lost a son to drugs, the president addressed his administration's plans for battling the opioid epidemic. "The administration is going to be rolling out policy over the next three weeks, and it will be very, very strong," Trump said. I've also spoken with [Attorney General] Jeff [Sessions] about bringing a lawsuit against some of these opioid companies."

Since President Trump declared the opioid epidemic a national public health emergency last October, advocates and members of Congress have complained they haven't seen much action and have struggled to get information about what the administration has been doing.

White House officials insist the administration has been hard at work, and that's what Thursday's opioid summit was all about. It featured Cabinet members, along with Mrs. Trump and counselor to the president Kellyanne Conway.

The summit was intended to "highlight the progress the Administration has made to combat drug demand and the opioid crisis," a White House official said in a statement.

In 2016, the most recent year for which data are available, opioid-related overdoses killed more than 42,000 Americans. That's an average of 115 deaths every day.

Last November, the president's commission on opioids released a lengthy set of recommendations, and most remain a work in progress or unaddressed altogether.

Several advocates NPR contacted ahead of the summit said they hadn't seen as much action as they had hoped, especially in the area of making quality, scientifically sound treatment options more readily available.

In recent weeks there has been some movement, with a congressional budget agreement pledging to add several billion dollars to combat the crisis and the Department of Justice announcing it would work with states that are suing drug manufacturers.

Still, the advocates said that is far short of what they had hoped when Trump declared an emergency, and they said they were interested to see what new information they could learn from the White House summit.

Panels planned for Thursday's event included a discussion of prevention, treatment and recovery with Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar, Veterans Affairs Secretary Dr. David Shulkin and Housing and Urban Development Secretary Dr. Ben Carson. A discussion of law enforcement and drug interdiction efforts with Secretary of Homeland Security Kirstjen Nielsen and Attorney General Jeff Sessions was also planned.

Also on the agenda: a question-and-answer session with Jim Carroll, the recently named acting director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy. President Trump has also nominated Carroll to permanently hold the position of "drug czar." Trump's first nominee was forced to withdraw. Carroll is a lawyer who has extensive government and private sector experience but hasn't done any work in the public health arena.

Other administration officials were expected to attend as well as about 200 advocates and others directly connected to the opioid crisis. There were some well-known names among them, including former congresswoman Mary Bono, Florida Attorney General Pam Bondi who was a member of the president's opioid commission, the first lady of North Dakota Kathryn Helgaas Burgum who is herself recovering from opioid addiction and former Fox News personality Eric Bolling whose son died of an opioid overdose.

"It's a problem that's growing," the president also said while speaking to those at the summit Thursday. "And drugs are a similar but different problem," Trump also said, "in the sense that we have pushers and we have drug dealers that don't — I mean, they kill hundreds and hundreds of people, and most of them don't even go to jail."

"Some countries have a very, very tough penalty — the ultimate penalty [for drug dealers]," Trump also said. "And, by the way, they have much less of a drug problem than we do. So we're going to have to be very strong on penalties."

Speaking before to NPR before the start of the event, the nation's top doctor said he was a mission to raise awareness about the epidemic. "We want America to understand this is a problem," Surgeon General Jerome Adams said in an interview that aired Thursday on Morning Edition. "The majority of the public does not see the opioid epidemic as rising to the level of an emergency, so it's important that we continue to say at the highest levels, this is a problem in all communities and it's getting worse."

But he added he also wants Americans to have hope. "The administration has prioritized the issue and is implementing strategies around saving lives, lowering demand and lowering supply," said Adams.

Trump Brings Up Death Penalty For Drug Dealers, Suing Drug Companies At Opioids Summit

CBS News, March 1, 2018

President Trump made an unexpected appearance at a White House summit on the opioid crisis Thursday afternoon, floating penalties for "opioid companies" and tougher punishments for drug dealers, noting that some countries have the "ultimate penalty."

"The administration's gonna' be rolling out policy over the next three weeks and it'll be very, very strong," the

president said. "I've also spoken with Jeff (Sessions) about bringing a lawsuit against some of these opioid companies. I mean, what they're doing and the way, the distribution. You have people who go to the hospital with a broken arm and the come out addicted. They're addicted to painkillers, and they don't even know what happened."

"So we're going to very much, you know, as you know, I think we've been more involved than any administration by far. It's a problem that's growing. And drugs are a similar but different problem in the sense that we have pushers, and we have drug dealers that don't — I mean, they kill hundreds and hundreds of people. And most of them don't even go to jail. You know, if you shoot one person, they give you life, they give you the death penalty. These people can kill 2,000, 3000 people, and nothing happen to them. And we need strength with respect to the pushers and to the drug dealers. And if you don't do that, you're never going to solve the problem."

"Some countries have a very, very tough penalty, the ultimate penalty," the president said. "And by the way, they have much less of a drug problem than we do. So we're going to have to be very strong on penalties. Hopefully we can do some litigation against the opioid companies."

The president's comments came just after the West Virginia attorney general announced a lawsuit against the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration in an effort to decrease opioid prescriptions in the U.S.

The president ignored shouted questions as to whether he has confidence in his attorney general.

Trump Says He Has Spoken With Sessions About Suing Opioid Companies

Reuters, March 1, 2018

Full-text stories from Reuters currently cannot be included in this document. You may, however, click the link above to access the story.

Trump Suggests Death Penalty For Drug Dealers During White House Meeting On Opioids

By David Jackson

USA Today, March 1, 2018

WASHINGTON — President Trump broached the idea of instituting the death penalty for drug dealers on Thursday, but stopped short of formally proposing it.

"Some countries have a very, very tough penalty — the ultimate penalty," Trump said during a White House conference on the opioid crisis. "And, by the way, they have much less of a problem."

The Philippines and Singapore are among countries that execute drug dealers, and Trump has discussed those policies in meetings with the leaders of those countries, officials said.

Critics have assailed Trump's praise of Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte, whose self-proclaimed war on drugs has included extra-judicial killings.

In discussing the nation's epidemic of pain killer addiction at the White House, Trump said he will be "rolling out policy" over the next three weeks, and that he has spoken with Attorney General Jeff Sessions about possibly filing lawsuits against opioid companies.

He also amplified the theme of harsh penalties for those who traffic illegally in drugs.

"If you shoot one person, you get life in prison," Trump said. "These people kill 1,000, 2,000 people and nothing happens to them."

Trump Comforts Opioids Survivors, Vows Tough Fight

By Tom Howell Jr.

[Washington Times](#), March 1, 2018

President Trump stopped by a White House summit on opioids Thursday to comfort those who've lost children to the epidemic and decry "weak" penalties against drug pushers, saying countries with harsher penalties have less of a problem.

Mr. Trump offered encouragement to an old friend from the business world who lost his son to drugs, and boasted his White House is equipped to defeat the wider scourge of painkiller and heroin abuse.

"The administration will be rolling out policy over the next three weeks, and it'll be very strong," he said. "I think we've been involved than any other administration by far."

Mr. Trump pivoted from words of comfort to harsh talk about drug dealers and pushers, suggesting "blue ribbon" commissions won't solve the problem and that the U.S. should impose tougher penalties.

"These people can kill 2,000, 3,000 people and nothing happens to them," he said.

Trump Publicly Praises Death Sentences For Drug Dealers

By Marisa Schultz

[New York Post](#), March 1, 2018

WASHINGTON – President Trump said Thursday he wants tougher penalties for drug dealers and praised countries that punish pushers with the "ultimate" death penalty.

"Some countries have a very, very tough penalty, the ultimate penalty – and by the way they have much less of a drug problem than we do," Trump said at an opioid summit at the White House.

Trump expressed frustration that drug dealers aren't treated like murderers in the US justice system.

"If you shoot one person, they give you life (in prison). They give you the death penalty," Trump said. "These people can kill 2,000, 3,000 people and nothing happens to 'em."

Trump said his administration will be rolling out a new policy in coming weeks and said he's talked to Attorney General Jeff Sessions about joining states in their lawsuits against drug companies that make prescription pain killers — often the gateway to addiction.

"We need strength with respect to the pushers and the drug dealers. If you don't do that you are never going to solve the problem," Trump said. "If you want to be weak and you want to talk about blue ribbon committees. That's not the answer. The answer is you have to have strength and you have to have toughness."

Trump has privately expressed praise for other countries that kill drug dealers, including Singapore which has a death penalty for drug trafficking offenses, according to Axios. He also likes crackdowns in China and the Philippines.

"He often jokes about killing drug dealers. He'll say, 'You know the Chinese and Filipinos don't have a drug problem. They just kill them,'" a senior administration official told Axios.

Trump Advocates 'The Ultimate Penalty' For Drug Dealers During Opioid Summit

By Elizabeth Landers

[CNN](#), March 1, 2018

Washington (CNN) President Donald Trump seemed to advocate the death penalty for drug dealers on Thursday during brief comments at an opioid summit at the White House.

During his unannounced appearance in the White House East Room, the President commented on "some countries" that have much stricter punishments for drug dealers. This came after a riff on the "drug dealers and drug pushers" who Trump says are "really doing damage."

"Some countries have a very, very tough penalty. The ultimate penalty. And by the way, they have much less of a drug problem than we do. So we're going to have to be very strong on penalties," Trump said.

The White House did not immediately respond to CNN's follow-up questions about what exactly Trump meant.

The comments come after Axios reported earlier this week that the President has floated the idea to aides of enforcing a death penalty for drug dealers in the United States.

The President spent the majority of his remarks touting his administration's involvement in combating the opioid crisis, something that's been a focus of his since the campaign trail. He said Wednesday that the country needs to fight the drug epidemic with "strength and toughness." He also said that he had spoken with his embattled Attorney

General Jeff Sessions about bringing lawsuits against "some of these opioid companies."

Trump Suggests Death Penalty To Stop Opioid Epidemic

By Sarah Karlin-Smith

Politico, March 1, 2018

President Donald Trump on Thursday suggested using the death penalty on drug dealers to address the opioid epidemic, equating providing lethal drugs with murder.

"We have pushers and drugs dealers, they are killing hundreds and hundreds of people," Trump said at a White House summit on opioid abuse. "If you shoot one person, they give you life, they give you the death penalty. These people can kill 2,000, 3,000 people and nothing happens to them."

Trump said countries that impose the death penalty on drug dealers have a better record than the United States in combating substance abuse.

"Some countries have a very, very tough penalty — the ultimate penalty — and by the way, they have much less of a drug problem than we do," he said.

The remarks follow media reports earlier this week that Trump has privately praised countries like Singapore that mandate the death penalty for drug traffickers, arguing a softer approach to substance abuse won't be successful.

The remarks are likely to rankle administration critics who have urged the White House to focus on the public health component of the opioid crisis. The president's remarks did not touch on health approaches like providing additional funding for treatment.

Trump also said his administration will unveil new policies to address the crisis over the next few weeks but did not provide any details, simply stating they would be "very, very strong."

He expressed support for going after pharmaceutical companies and distributors that supply prescription painkillers for their role in the crisis.

Attorney General Jeff Sessions said this week that the Justice Department will file a statement of interest in litigation that includes hundreds of lawsuits by states and localities against opioid manufacturers and distributors.

The Justice Department will argue that the federal government has borne substantial costs due to the opioid epidemic and should be reimbursed for health programs and law enforcement efforts to combat the crisis.

Cities, counties and states are seeking to recover the costs associated with providing treatment and public safety, by targeting companies that they allege used false, deceptive or unfair marketing practices for prescription opioids.

Sessions also said the federal government is studying the possibility of initiating its own opioid litigation.

The federal government previously went after many opioid-makers in court a decade ago, with companies like Purdue Pharma pleading guilty to misleading regulators, doctors and patients about the drugs' risks of addiction and abuse.

President Trump Suggests Executing Drug Dealers At Summit On Opioid Crisis

By Katie Zezima

Washington Post, March 1, 2018

President Trump suggested that executing drug dealers could help solve the opioid crisis during a White House summit Thursday, an event the administration billed as a way to measure its progress in combating the nation's drug problem.

"Some countries have a very tough penalty, the ultimate penalty, and they have much less of a drug problem than we do," Trump said.

Trump also said that the administration will roll out unspecified "strong" policies on opioids over the next three weeks. He said he has spoken to Attorney General Jeff Sessions about "bringing a lawsuit against some of these opioid companies."

White House officials said that the administration is considering whether to make trafficking large quantities of fentanyl a capital crime because of the drug's potential to kill so many.

"If you shoot one person, you get life in prison," Trump said. "These people kill 1,000, 2,000 people, and nothing happens to them."

Trump's statements came at the end of a two-hour summit on opioid addiction, in which Cabinet secretaries talked about combating the nation's opioid epidemic with treatment programs and law enforcement officials discussed efforts to disrupt the supply chain for heroin and fentanyl in Mexico and China.

Trump's emphasis on criminal penalties stands in contrast to the focus on treatment by some of his Cabinet secretaries and many fighting the epidemic nationwide.

Other members of the administration have expressed interest in more-punitive measures: Sessions has directed his prosecutors to pursue the harshest penalties possible in drug cases.

A White House official said Trump has privately expressed interest in Singapore's policy of executing drug dealers. He also has endorsed Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte, whose "drug war" has led to the deaths of thousands of people by extrajudicial police killings. Last year, Trump praised Duterte in a phone call for doing an "unbelievable job on the drug problem," according to the New York Times.

Trump's comments alarmed some who work in public health.

"We've tried enforcement before and interdiction before for many years with the war on drugs, and it's been completely unsuccessful," said Andrew Saxon, a psychiatry professor at the University of Washington. "When it comes to the death penalty, I'm totally against it."

Trump declared the opioid epidemic a "health emergency" in October, but cities overwhelmed by the crisis have complained that there has been little action or money from Washington in the months since.

During the summit, Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar said the administration wants to expand medication-assisted treatment for people who are addicted to opioids and urged states to apply for Medicaid waivers to get people into treatment. Addiction, he said, is a medical issue that needs to be treated as such.

"At HHS and across this administration, we know that we need to treat addiction as a medical challenge, not as a moral failing," Azar said.

Sessions and Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen talked about efforts to disrupt overseas suppliers of heroin and fentanyl, including efforts to prosecute traffickers of any fentanyl-related substance and efforts to work with the governments of Mexico and China to cut off the supply chain. Nielsen said that only about two pounds of illicit fentanyl were seized by Customs and Border Protection in 2013; in 2017, the agency interdicted 1,485 pounds of fentanyl.

The summit sought to highlight how addiction has become a personal issue for millions in the country, including some in the administration. Surgeon General Jerome M. Adams talked about visiting his brother who suffered from addiction in prison. Jim Carroll, who was just named deputy director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy, said he has a family member who has struggled with addiction.

Kathleen O'Connor, director of public policy for the treatment advocacy nonprofit group Shatterproof, said she is heartened by the administration's efforts to combat the opioid crisis. Trump interacted with families at the summit in a compelling way, she said, that shows his attention to the issue.

"I think the administration is obviously making a very concerted effort," she said. "I was heartened to hear that at least the agencies are focused on solutions."

The Justice Department on Tuesday said it would file a statement of interest in hundreds of lawsuits against drug companies brought by cities, counties and medical institutions seeking reimbursement for the cost of the drug crisis. Sessions said the Justice Department would seek repayment as well, arguing that the federal government has borne substantial costs.

On Thursday, Sessions directed the Drug Enforcement Administration to consider reducing the number of opioids manufactured in the United States.

But the administration did not specify what its upcoming policy initiatives will be and how it plans to implement recommendations made by an opioid task force.

"While I appreciate that the Trump Administration is continuing to raise awareness about the devastating fentanyl, heroin, and opioid crisis with today's White House Opioid Summit, what we really need is meaningful action, not just more words," Sen. Maggie Hassan (D-N.H.) said in a statement.

Melania Trump Calls For Action At Opioid Summit

By Peter Sullivan

The Hill, March 1, 2018

First lady Melania Trump called for action on the opioid crisis in a speech Thursday kicking off a White House summit on the epidemic.

The first lady added her voice to the discussion as the administration works to highlight steps it has taken to address the crisis.

"I am so proud of the work that this administration has already done to combat this epidemic," Trump said. "We all know there is still much work to be done, which is why we are all here today."

The first lady read from a letter written by a woman who lost her son to an opioid overdose. In her remarks, Trump called for a focus on babies and young mothers with addiction.

A range of other administration officials, including Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar, Attorney General Jeff Sessions and Veterans Affairs Secretary David Shulkin also spoke at the summit.

Azar highlighted his discussions at the National Governors Association's winter meeting last weekend, where he encouraged governors to apply for waivers that allow states to expand the opioid addiction treatments that Medicaid can be used to compensate.

"I'm hopeful that we'll see a faster clip," Azar said. "Those waivers are very easy to do."

Shulkin highlighted that opioid use in the VA system has declined 41 percent since 2012.

Melania Trump: 'We Need To Change' Arc Of Opioid Crisis

Associated Press, March 1, 2018

Melania Trump said Thursday that many people are grieving after losing loved ones to the opioid crisis, telling a White House summit on the issue that "we need to change that."

Opening the gathering in the East Room of the White House, the first lady read from a letter from Betty Henderson. The North Fort Myers, Florida, woman who lost her 29-year-

old son Billy to drugs last September. Henderson wrote to Mrs. Trump one month after her son died.

In the letter, Henderson appealed to the first lady as a mother and asked for her help "in claiming these lost souls before drugs take them from this earth."

Mrs. Trump asked audience members to remember Henderson as they work through issues related to opioids, including prescription opioids, heroin and fentanyl. Overdoses involving opioids killed more than 42,000 people in 2016, more than any year on record, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"Let's all keep Betty and her son Billy in mind today as you are working through some of the issues related to the opioid epidemic," the first lady said. "Sadly, she is not alone in her grief, and we need to change that." Mrs. Trump acknowledged Henderson by calling her up on stage.

The White House is hosting the summit to highlight Trump administration efforts to combat the opioid crisis.

Kellyanne Conway, a senior adviser to President Donald Trump, was moderating the two-hour event featuring top officials from the departments of Health and Human Services, Veterans Affairs, Housing and Urban Development, State, Justice and Homeland Security. The officials are providing updates on how they are tackling the epidemic. Besides administration officials, individuals affected by the crisis and nonprofit groups that focus on addiction and recovery also attended.

Trump has said the issue is a top priority for his administration, but critics say the effort falls short – something the first lady seemed to acknowledge when she said: "We all know there is still much work to be done."

Last October, Trump declared the opioid crisis a public health emergency, stopping short of the full state of emergency declaration sought by an advisory board he empaneled. The president also recently signed a budget agreement that will provide a record \$6 billion over the next two years to fight opioid abuse. Decisions must still be made on how the money will be allocated.

The first lady has shown a keen interest in the opioids issue. She has attended meetings on the issue and visited hospitals and nonprofit drug treatment facilities for briefings.

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Trump's Drug Czar Nominee Reveals Family Member Has Addiction

By Kimberly Leonard

[Washington Examiner](#), March 1, 2018

President Trump's nominee to be the nation's next drug czar shared publicly for the first time on Thursday that his family has been personally affected by the opioid epidemic.

Jim Carroll, who has been nominated as director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy, and is currently serving as its acting director, did not disclose who the family member was. He was speaking at the White House's opioid summit and noted that data show one in seven members of the public have a family member, friend or neighbor that has been impacted by the opioid crisis, which involves addiction and overdose deaths from drugs like prescription painkillers, heroin, and fentanyl.

"For the first time publicly I want to tell you that I am that one in seven, that I have a family member who has been touched by this," Carroll said. "Last year I was in the rehab center with my family member holding that person's hand, helping them through this and trying to be that support system. And so it's a great honor for me to take this on. This is a professional and a personal challenge for me, for the president and every member of this administration."

Carroll was previously deputy chief of staff in the White House for three months.

Jobless Claims Hit Lowest Level Since 1969

By John Carney

[Breitbart](#), March 1, 2018

New claims for unemployment benefits fell to their lowest level since 1969 last week.

Economists had been expecting 226,000 new jobless claims, a rise over the previous week. Instead, claims unexpectedly fell by 10,000 to 210,000 in the week ending on February 24.

The more stable four week moving average of claims also declined, dropping by 5,000 to 220,500. That is also the lowest level in 49 years.

Slightly more people were added to the unemployment rolls than came off them, pushing the number of continuing claims up by 57,000 to 1.93 million.

Powell Bullish On Economy, But Sees No Signs Of Overheating

Federal Reserve chairman tells a Senate panel he isn't seeing a breakout in wage gains

By Nick Timiraos

[Wall Street Journal](#), March 1, 2018

Full-text stories from the Wall Street Journal are available to Journal subscribers by clicking the link.

Justice Dept. Report Is Expected To Criticize Andrew McCabe Over Media Disclosures

By Matt Apuzzo

[New York Times](#), March 1, 2018

WASHINGTON — A Justice Department review is expected to criticize the former F.B.I. deputy director, Andrew G. McCabe, for authorizing the disclosure of information

about a continuing investigation to journalists, according to four people familiar with the inquiry.

Such a damning report would give President Trump new ammunition to criticize Mr. McCabe, who is at the center of Mr. Trump's theory that "deep state" actors inside the F.B.I. have been working to sabotage his presidency. But Mr. McCabe's disclosures to the news media do not fit neatly into that assumption: They contributed to a negative article about Hillary Clinton and the Obama administration's Justice Department — not Mr. Trump.

The department's inspector general, Michael E. Horowitz, has zeroed in on disclosures to The Wall Street Journal as part of a wide-ranging investigation into, among other things, how the F.B.I. approached the 2016 inquiry into Mrs. Clinton's handling of classified information. Mr. Horowitz has said he expects to release a report this month or next.

Mr. McCabe, under pressure from the F.B.I. director, Christopher A. Wray, stepped down as the deputy director in late January amid concerns over the coming report.

The findings have potentially serious ramifications for the F.B.I., which is in the middle of a special counsel investigation into the Trump campaign's ties to Russia. Though the report is not expected to focus on that, some of the same agents — including Mr. McCabe — handled both the Russia case and the Clinton inquiry. A report that questions the judgment of those agents would give fodder for Mr. Trump and his supporters to step up their attacks on the F.B.I.

A spokesman for Mr. Horowitz declined to comment. Mr. McCabe also declined to comment. He and his allies have steadfastly maintained that he did nothing improper and cooperated fully with the inspector general.

In October 2016, The Wall Street Journal revealed a dispute between F.B.I. and Justice Department officials over how to proceed in an investigation into the financial dealings of the Clinton family's foundation. The article revealed a closed-door meeting during which senior Justice Department officials were dismissive of the evidence and declined to authorize subpoenas or grand jury activity. Some F.B.I. agents, the article said, believed that Mr. McCabe had put the brakes on the investigation.

Others rejected that notion. The Journal, citing sources including "one person close to Mr. McCabe," revealed a tense conversation with a senior Justice Department official in which Mr. McCabe insisted that the F.B.I. had the authority to press ahead with the investigation into the Clinton Foundation.

The inspector general has concluded that Mr. McCabe authorized F.B.I. officials to provide information for that article, according to the four people, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the report before it is published. The public affairs office had arranged a phone call to discuss the case, the

people said. Mr. McCabe, as deputy director, had the authority to engage the news media.

Such calls are common practice across the federal government when officials believe that journalists have only part of the story. Rather than let incomplete or inaccurate coverage circulate, officials often try to fill out the picture or provide a defense. But Justice Department rules prohibit the dissemination of confidential information, and the inspector general's report is expected to criticize Mr. McCabe for disclosing the existence of a continuing investigation to The Journal.

When an inquiry uncovers evidence that an agent has violated Justice Department regulations, the inspector general typically refers the matter to the F.B.I.'s Office of Professional Responsibility, which handles questions of punishment.

It is unclear whether the inspector general will identify others who spoke about the Clinton investigation. But Mr. McCabe is by far the most prominent subject. Mr. Trump has taunted him on Twitter, writing in December that he "is racing the clock to retire with full benefits. 90 days to go?!!!" Mr. McCabe is eligible to retire March 18.

Mr. Trump has animosity toward Mr. McCabe for several reasons, including his close ties to the former F.B.I. director James B. Comey, whom Mr. Trump fired last year. But the president is particularly bothered by the fact that Mr. McCabe's wife, Jill, ran as a Democrat in a failed campaign for a State Senate seat in Virginia. Her campaign received hundreds of thousands of dollars in donations from a political committee run by Terry McAuliffe, the Virginia governor at the time and a longtime ally of the Clintons.

Later, after Mrs. McCabe lost the race, Mr. McCabe was promoted to deputy director and oversaw the Clinton investigation. Though Mr. McCabe sought ethics and legal advice about whether to recuse himself, some in the F.B.I. considered his involvement a conflict of interest. Ultimately, amid scrutiny from the news media, Mr. Comey pressured Mr. McCabe to recuse himself. The inspector general is examining whether Mr. McCabe should have done so earlier.

Mr. Trump has seized on that issue in repeatedly criticizing Mr. McCabe, a lifelong Republican who did not vote in the 2016 election. In face-to-face meetings with Mr. McCabe, the president questioned how he had voted and needled him about his wife. In one instance, he called Mrs. McCabe "a loser," according to people familiar with the conversation, which was first reported by NBC News.

Mr. McCabe's allies at the F.B.I. say that Mr. Trump is also eager to discredit Mr. McCabe because he can corroborate Mr. Comey's accounts of meetings with Mr. Trump.

Mr. McCabe rose quickly through the F.B.I. ranks and was seen as new model for the second-in-command when he was promoted in 2016. The F.B.I. had transformed from a

law-and-order agency to an integral part of the nation's intelligence apparatus, and Mr. McCabe, who graduated from Duke and Washington University School of Law in St. Louis, was picked not based on a career of street work but based on his intellect and decision-making.

That won him equal parts praise and disdain inside the F.B.I., with longtime agents accusing him of having ascended too quickly.

Mr. McCabe is on leave while he awaits retirement. He was succeeded by David L. Bowdich, the acting F.B.I. deputy director.

Report Said To Fault FBI's Former No. 2 For Approving Improper Media Disclosure, Misleading Inspector General

By Matt Zapotosky And Karoun Demirjian
Washington Post, March 1, 2018

The Justice Department inspector general is preparing a damaging report on former FBI deputy director Andrew McCabe, alleging he was responsible for approving an improper media disclosure, two people familiar with the matter said. One of the people said McCabe will also be accused of misleading investigators about his actions.

The report is a part of Inspector General Michael Horowitz's broad review of the FBI and Justice Department's handling of the investigation into Hillary Clinton's use of a private email server while she was secretary of state.

During that work, inspector general's investigators found that McCabe had authorized the disclosure of information to the Wall Street Journal for an October 2016 story that examined feuding inside the FBI and Justice Department around the handling of a separate investigation into Clinton's family foundation, two people familiar with the case said.

Those probing the matter believe that McCabe, who stepped down in January, misled them when they initially inquired about the subject, though one person familiar with the forthcoming report said McCabe disputes that he intentionally misled investigators.

It is unclear how McCabe is said to have misled investigators. The inspector general's findings on the media disclosure were first reported by the New York Times.

Through a representative, McCabe declined to comment. A spokesman for the inspector general also declined to comment.

Horowitz's report is almost certain to be used by President Trump, who has railed against leaks and made McCabe a particular target of his ire in recent months. McCabe, 49, briefly served as acting FBI director after President Trump fired James B. Comey from the job, and much like the man he succeeded, McCabe soon became a lightning rod in the political battles over the FBI, Clinton and

special counsel Robert S. Mueller III's investigation into whether the Trump campaign coordinated with Russia to influence the 2016 election.

The 2016 Wall Street Journal report came just as the FBI had reopened the Clinton email investigation on the eve of the presidential election — a matter that was separate from the Clinton Foundation case but had parallels in the way it was fraught with politics.

The Journal's story was notable for the level of detail it contained about internal law enforcement debates, and its revelation of specific information about an ongoing criminal case was considered by the inspector general to be particularly problematic. It presents McCabe as a complicated figure — one who at times is seen by those lower in the bureau as standing in the way of the Clinton Foundation investigation, though he also seems to stand up to Justice Department leaders.

The Journal reported that McCabe retorted to a Justice Department official upset to learn of steps the FBI had taken in the Clinton Foundation investigation, "Are you telling me that I need to shut down a validly predicated investigation?" That would contradict any attempt by Trump or the GOP to claim that he was favoring the Democratic presidential candidate.

The Journal's story was written by Devlin Barrett, now a reporter at The Washington Post. Spokesmen for the Journal did not return an email message. Recently released text messages from an FBI agent and FBI lawyer involved in the Clinton email case show that two days before the story was published, the lawyer, Lisa Page, and the FBI's top spokesman, Michael Kortan, were on the phone with Barrett for an extended conversation.

Page worked in the FBI general counsel's office and with McCabe, and she was briefly detailed to Mueller's investigation into whether the Trump campaign coordinated with Russia to influence the 2016 election. An FBI spokeswoman declined to comment, and Page's lawyer did not respond to messages Thursday night.

Kortan, who has since left the FBI, could not immediately be reached for comment.

Background briefings with high-level government officials are common in Washington, particularly when reporters already have information and agencies hope to fill in the gaps on limited, and potentially misleading, facts. But law enforcement officials are generally instructed not to reveal ongoing criminal investigations.

While the inspector general uncovered allegations specific to McCabe during his broader look at the Clinton email case, his report on the FBI official is not likely to be the only one the work produces. Horowitz is also examining broad allegations of misconduct involving Comey, the public statement he made recommending that the case be closed

without charges and his decision on the eve of the election to reveal to Congress that the FBI had resumed its work.

Horowitz has said publicly he is going to release that report in March or April.

It was not immediately clear whether Comey knew about McCabe's alleged authorization to disclose information to the media. Asked in May 2017 at a congressional hearing whether he had "ever been an anonymous source in news reports about matters relating to the Trump investigation or the Clinton investigation" or if he had "ever authorized someone else at the FBI to be an anonymous source in news reports about the Trump investigation or the Clinton investigation," Comey replied, "Never" and "No."

Late last month, Comey defended the man he picked to be his top deputy, writing on Twitter that McCabe, "stood tall over the last 8 months, when small people were trying to tear down an institution we all depend on. He served with distinction for two decades."

In May, after Comey's firing, Trump asked McCabe in an Oval Office meeting whom he had voted for in the 2016 election, and vented over donations McCabe's wife, who ran as a Democrat for a seat in the Virginia legislature, had received from the political action committee of Terry McAuliffe.

McAuliffe, then the governor of Virginia, is an ally of Clinton, and McCabe, after his wife's loss in the race, would go on to supervise the probe into Clinton's use of a private email server.

In the months that followed that conversation, Trump repeatedly took aim at McCabe in private and on Twitter, asking why his attorney general had not removed him from his post and remarking in December that the then-No. 2 official was "racing the clock to retire with full benefits."

McCabe had long planned to retire March 18, when he became eligible to receive his benefits, but in late January, he surprised the bureau when he abruptly stepped down. The move came after a private meeting in which FBI Director Christopher A. Wray expressed concern to McCabe about what the inspector general had found.

"My conviction to adhering to process is similarly matched by my conviction to holding people accountable," Wray wrote later in a message to staff that thanked McCabe for his "years of dedicated, selfless and brave service to the FBI and the American people."

McCabe is still expected to formally retire in March. It was not immediately clear whether the inspector general's report would affect that.

Ellen Nakashima and Sari Horwitz contributed to this report.

AP Source: Ex-FBI No. 2 To Be Criticized In Watchdog Report

By Eric Tucker

Associated Press, March 1, 2018

WASHINGTON — The Justice Department's inspector general is expected to criticize former FBI Deputy Director Andrew McCabe as part of its investigation into the bureau's handling of the Hillary Clinton email probe, a person familiar with the matter said Thursday night.

McCabe, a frequent target of President Donald Trump's ire, left his position in January as the FBI's No. 2 official and is scheduled to retire later this month after more than 20 years with the bureau. He served for several months as acting director following Trump's firing last May of FBI Director James Comey.

The person, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss a forthcoming inspector general report, said the criticism of McCabe was expected to be in connection with a media disclosure and a question of whether proper procedures were followed in the release of information.

Spokespeople for the Justice Department, the FBI and the inspector general declined to comment Thursday evening. McCabe did not return a phone message seeking comment.

The report, initiated more than a year ago and due out within weeks, has been eagerly anticipated in Washington and will unquestionably add new details to the debate on how law enforcement officials handled election-year investigations into both Clinton, the Democratic presidential candidate, and Trump's successful Republican campaign.

It will be released as the FBI finds itself under steady attack from Trump and other Republicans who criticize the organization as politically slanted and antagonistic toward the administration. Trump repeatedly railed against Comey after firing him, an action now under investigation. And the White House has more recently found itself at odds with the new director, Christopher Wray, over the release of a Republican memo — derived from classified information — on the investigation into possible ties between Russia and the Trump campaign.

The New York Times, which first reported the finding, said the inspector general report would conclude that McCabe had authorized FBI officials to provide information for a Wall Street Journal article in October 2016.

That article, published days after Comey notified Congress that the FBI was revisiting the Clinton investigation following the discovery of a new batch of emails, described tensions between the FBI and the Justice Department — led at the time by Attorney General Loretta Lynch — over how aggressively Clinton and the Clinton Foundation should be investigated. The story characterized Justice Department officials as skeptical of the FBI's evidence and discouraging of an aggressive pursuit of potential financial crimes involving the Clinton Foundation.

The inspector general in January 2017 announced a wide-ranging investigation into the FBI's actions during the Clinton email investigation, which concluded months earlier without charges.

Included in the review are apparent leaks to the news media during the investigation, and Comey's decision to publicly announce the FBI's recommendation that Clinton not face charges over her handling of classified email in a private server. Comey subsequently notified Congress just over a week before the election that newly discovered emails would have to be reviewed, then days later told lawmakers that nothing had been found to change his original assessment.

Though strenuously defended for months by Comey, the FBI's actions in the Clinton investigation elicited bipartisan anger and provided the White House's stated rationale for Trump's dismissal of Comey. Trump has since said he was thinking of "this Russia thing" when he fired Comey, a move special counsel Robert Mueller has closely examined for possible obstruction of justice.

Trump verbally attacked McCabe during the campaign and again as president because McCabe's wife, during a failed state Senate run, had accepted campaign contributions from the political action committee of then-Virginia Gov. Terry McAuliffe, a close Clinton ally.

The FBI has said McCabe received the necessary ethics approval and was not supervising the Clinton email case at the time of the contributions, but the inspector general is nonetheless investigating whether he should have recused. When news broke in late December that McCabe planned to retire in the spring, Trump mocked him on Twitter as "racing the clock to retire with full benefits."

The inspector general's office made headlines this week when Trump, in an angry tweet directed at Attorney General Jeff Sessions, erroneously suggested that the FBI report was late. Inspector General Michael Horowitz has said the report was expected around March or April, a timeline that has not changed.

Trump also criticized Sessions for asking the inspector general to investigate potential surveillance abuses by the FBI in the early stages of the Russia investigation, saying that such a probe should be handled instead by "Justice Department lawyers." Sessions later defended himself in an unusual statement.

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FBI-debunked Russia-Trump Story Helped New York Times Win Journalism Award

By Rowan Scarborough

Washington Times, March 1, 2018

One of the stories for which the New York Times won a coveted George Polk Award was a Russia-Trump report that was repudiated by former FBI Director James Comey.

The Times won the award on Feb. 20 for 12 stories it submitted on Donald Trump and his associates ties to Russia, according to a list provided by Polk to The Washington Times.

One of them was a Feb. 14, 2017 story headlined, "Trump Campaign Aides Had Repeated Contacts with Russian Intelligence."

Written by Michael S. Schmidt, Mark Mazzetti and Matt Apuzzo, the lead said:

"Phone records and intercepted calls show that members of Donald J. Trump's 2016 presidential campaign and other Trump associates had repeated contacts with senior Russian intelligence officials in the year before the election, according to four current and former American officials."

In essence, the story asserted that Trump people colluded with Russian intelligence, which hacked Democrat Party computers in 2015-16.

The story, plus the infamous Christopher Steele dossier, played major roles in pushing the Trump-Russian collusion narrative in Washington as committees ramped up investigations.

More than a year later, Republicans contend there was no collusion.

Four months after the Times story appeared, at a hearing before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, Sen. Tom Cotton, Arkansas Republican, had this exchange with then-former director Comey:

COTTON: On February 14th, the New York Times published a story, the headline of which was, "Trump Campaign Aides Had Repeated Contacts With Russian Intelligence."

You were asked earlier if that was an inaccurate story, and you said, in the main. Would it be fair to characterize that story as almost entirely wrong?

COMEY: Yes.

Also, questioned by Sen. James Risch, Idaho Republican, Mr. Comey said he was so alarmed by the story he first checked with the intelligence community to see if he had missed something. Finding out he had not, he notified congressional leaders to discard the report.

RISCH: In addition to that, after that, you sought out both Republican and Democrat senators to tell them that, hey, I don't know where this is coming from, but this is not the — this is not factual. Do you recall that?

COMEY: Yes.

RISCH: OK. So — so, again, so the American people can understand this, that report by the New York Times was not true. Is that a fair statement?

COMEY: In — in the main, it was not true. And, again, all of you know this, maybe the American people don't. The challenge — and I'm not picking on reporters about writing stories about classified information, is that people talking about it often don't really know what's going on.

The New York Times public affairs office did not immediately return a message.

Headquartered at Long Island University, a Polk award is one of the most coveted in journalism. Awards for Trump Russia coverage in 2017 went to the Washington Post as well as the Times.

The citation said in part, "Special recognition goes out this year to the staffs of The New York Times and The Washington Post for their extraordinary effort in uncovering the connection between the Trump presidential campaign and the Kremlin that led to Special Counsel Robert Mueller's ongoing investigation. The Polk judges felt the investigative work, based on the cultivation of sources, was equally outstanding on the part of both newspapers and may play a significant role in safeguarding our democracy from foreign interference."

While Mr. Comey debunked the Feb. 14 story, The Times did not back off it.

The Times won for 12 stories in all. They included its exclusive on Mr. Comey's private memos he wrote for the record after one-on-one meetings with President Trump. The Times also broke the story that the FBI opened a counter-intelligence investigation in July 2016 after receiving a report from a diplomat about Trump volunteer George Papadopoulos. The volunteer said he heard from a Kremlin-linked professor that Moscow owned "thousands" of Hillary Clinton emails.

Wikileaks released stolen Democrat Party emails that month that the U.S. says came from Russian hacking. The hack is part of the ongoing special counsel investigation into Russia election interference and if Trump people helped.

The FBI placed a wiretap on onetime Trump volunteer Carter Page on Oct. 21, 2016 that would last nearly a year. Mr. Page, a former Moscow resident, had traveled to the city in July to deliver a public speech at a university.

The dossier said he met with two Kremlin operatives and discussed bribes. Under oath, Mr. Page has repeatedly denied he ever met the men and says he will not be charged with wrongdoing.

When Mr. Comey testified in June, the FBI was obtaining its last 90-day surveillance warrant on Mr. Page.

The FBI has not confirmed the dossier's major charges, but continues to investigate.

The dossier, written by ex-British spy Steele and financed by Democrats, said there was an "extensive conspiracy" between the Trump campaign and the Kremlin.

The dossier was posted by BuzzFeed on Jan. 10, a month before the New York Times story which basically made the same charge.

White House: Trump Wants Overhaul Of FISA For Getting Surveillance Warrants

By Louis Nelson

Politico, March 1, 2018

White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders said on Thursday that the process by which the government obtains secret surveillance warrants should be reformed, a conclusion that she said President Donald Trump had come to after revelations that individuals tied to his 2016 campaign were monitored by the intelligence community.

"Look, the president's made clear that he has a lot of concerns like you said with the current FISA process," Sanders said at the daily press briefing, referring to the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act. "Nothing makes the problems of FISA clearer than what was outlined in both the Republican and the Democrat memos."

Lawmakers on the House Intelligence Committee released dueling partisan memos about whether the intelligence community relied on a dossier of salacious but unverified information on Trump to obtain a surveillance warrant against Carter Page, a Trump campaign adviser.

The Republican memo, which was released first and written by the staff of Rep. Devin Nunes (R-Calif.), chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, alleged that the FBI sought a warrant against Page related to its Russia investigation based on the dossier without disclosing that it had been financed in part by the Democratic National Committee and the campaign of Hillary Clinton.

Democrats, in their memo, responded that the bureau's investigation into allegations of collusion between the Trump campaign and the Kremlin predated its receipt of the dossier.

Trump has railed in recent weeks against the intelligence community, declaring that ongoing investigations into his campaign amount to a politically motivated "witch hunt." As evidence of the issues she said pervade the FISA system, Sanders said the FBI had not disclosed the political origins of the dossier in obtaining the warrant against Page — even though the bureau did just that in a footnote of its submission to the FISA court.

"The FBI used political campaign material to get a warrant to spy on American citizens," Sanders said on Thursday. "They failed to disclose to the judge that the dossier was funded by the Clinton campaign, and DNC even as it was being used to spy on people associated with the Trump campaign. Obviously, that alone shows us that the process needs to be looked at closely and reformed to make sure that we're doing everything we can to protect the privacy of American citizens."

House Democrats' FISA Memo Confirms Republicans' Charges Of Abuse

By Jason Beale

The Federalist, March 1, 2018

The Democrats on the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence (HPSCI) finally dropped their Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act abuse rebuttal memo Saturday afternoon, and the reaction is murky.

If you had your money on a comprehensive, point-by-point refutation of the "scurrilous allegations" of evidentiary malfeasance laid out in the majority (Nunes) memo, you're going to need to cut a check. If your bet was on the construction and destruction of straw-men unassociated with the proceedings, and confirmation the use of raw, unevaluated intelligence to argue probable cause that an American citizen "knowingly acted as an agent of a foreign power," you can proceed to the cashier window to redeem your ticket.

Some background. The HPSCI majority memo (the Nunes memo), which was released to the public on February 2, contained a number of specific allegations of inappropriate conduct by Federal Bureau of Investigation and Department of Justice officials seeking the approval of the FISA court (FISC) to monitor the communications of former Trump campaign advisor Carter Page. These allegations included the introduction into evidence of unconfirmed, uncorroborated sections of the infamous Christopher Steele dossier; the omission of material context in vouching for the reliability of their source (Steele); and the deliberate obfuscation of the fact that the Hillary Clinton campaign and Democratic National Committee paid for the dossier.

The Democrat HPSCI minority, led by Rep. Adam Schiff, fought the release of the Nunes memo on the grounds that it would recklessly expose sources and methods and, according to Schiff, erode public confidence in the FBI's ability to protect sources to the extent that releasing the memo might enable another Oklahoma City bombing. Schiff and his colleagues composed a rebuttal, and assured us that it would effectively "correct the record" on the Nunes memo—particularly on the reliability of the evidence presented to the FISC, and the Nunes contention that the judge wasn't fully apprised of the "partisan, political" provenance of the funding behind the dossier.

None of this came to pass with the release of the Schiff memo. What Actually Happened Inside That Counter-Memo

A close read of the Schiff memo reveals the incredulity of the Nunes memo claim that the Steele dossier initiated the FBI investigation into Trump associates' engagement with Russians. A close read of the Nunes memo reveals that it makes no such claim. In fact, the Nunes memo clearly states the investigation was initiated after the FBI received information concerning suspicious interactions between

Trump campaign advisor George Papadopoulos and a sketchy professor with alleged ties to Russian officials.

It's written very clearly in the memo, in plain English. Yet the Schiff memo works hard to undermine that strawman, and effectively confirms the Nunes memo description of the event that triggered the investigation.

Schiff then addresses the issue of source and evidence credibility. This is key to the Nunes memo allegations and to confidence in the FBI and DOJ officials charged with protecting every citizen's Fourth Amendment rights, even in the course of seeking legal access to citizens' most private communications.

In lieu of providing a single word of confirmation that any of the Page-related dossier information had been corroborated or validated prior to providing it to the court, the Schiff memo constructs a Page avatar whose past associations and contact with Russian spies, Kremlin officials, shady businessmen, and FBI agents represent an insurmountable trail of suspicion that can only be assumed to be criminally conspiratorial, and likely treasonous.

They do this by noting Page's 2013-2014 recruitment attempt by Russian spies in New York City, whose approaches inspired the FBI to alert Page and warn him away. Those spies were eventually arrested and convicted of espionage offenses after an investigation aided by information Page willingly provided. They further highlight Page's three-year residency working for Merrill Lynch in Moscow, separate trips to Russia in July and December of 2016, and numerous interviews with the FBI regarding, presumably, his interactions with Russians suspected of nefarious intentions. Building a Tower of Suspicion Around Carter Page

All of this builds a tower of suspicion around Page, the idiosyncratic Naval Academy graduate whose quirky and paranoid behavior on nationally televised interviews has inspired the derisive head-shaking of dozens of talking heads. They chortle at the naiveté of this man's eagerness to repeatedly throw himself into the lion's den of "The Situation Room" or "All In with Chris Hayes." They wonder what could possibly compel this man to subject himself to the open mocking of his declarations of innocence, again and again? The Schiff document describes an FBI/DOJ presentation of evidence that appears to draw from these instincts of suspicion and disbelief yet, significantly, offer no proof.

But they must offer proof, as Andrew McCarthy points out in the latest of his series of analytic National Review articles devoted to making sense of the FISA proceedings. McCarthy notes that: "(B)ecause Page was an American citizen, FISA law required that the FBI and the DOJ show not only that he was acting as an agent of a foreign power (Russia), but also that his 'clandestine' activities on behalf of Russia were a likely violation of federal criminal law. (See FISA, Section 1801(b)(2)(A) through (E), Title 50, U.S. Code.)

It is the Steele dossier that alleges Page was engaged in arguably criminal activity. The Democrats point to nothing else that does."

The Schiff memo offers that proof, the crucial passage of the Steele dossier undeniably used as the crux of their "criminal activity" contention. They present it as follows: "It is in this specific sub-section of the applications that DOJ refers to Steele's reporting on Page and his alleged coordination with Russian officials. Steele's information about Page was consistent with the FBI's assessment of Russian intelligence efforts to recruit him and his connections to Russian persons of interest."

"In particular, Steele's sources reported that Page met separately while in Russia with Igor Sechin, a close associate of Vladimir Putin and executive chairman of Rosneft, Russia's state-owned oil company, and Igor Divyekin, a senior Kremlin official. Sechin allegedly discussed the prospect of future U.S.-Russia energy cooperation and 'an associated move to lift Ukraine-related western sanctions against Russia.' Divyekin allegedly disclosed to Page that the Kremlin possessed compromising information on Clinton ('kompromat') and noted 'the possibility of its being released to Candidate #1's campaign.' (Note: 'Candidate #1' refers to candidate Trump.) This closely tracks what other Russian contacts were informing another Trump foreign policy advisor, George Papadopoulos."

The problem with this crucial passage is that it contains a fatal flaw, in that it is almost-certainly wrong. Page has testified repeatedly, under oath, that he had no such contact, meetings, or conversations with either Sechin or Divyekin. He did so both to the members of the HPSCI committee and during his numerous interviews with the FBI. He has further testified that he has never met Sechin in his life. He even issued a written denial in a letter he sent to former FBI director James Comey in September 2016, wherein he offered to meet with the FBI to resolve the issue. If Democrats Are Right, Page Should Be Arrested

The Democrats show little faith in the disputed, yet legally essential, evidence of these "meetings." In fact, they include in their memo this intriguing passage: "This information contradicts Page's November 2, 2017 testimony to the Committee, in which he initially denied any such meetings and then was forced to admit speaking with (Arkady) Dvorkovich and meeting with Rosneft's Sechin-tied investor relations chief Andrey Baranov."

If there is evidence to the contrary, Page should quite rightly be arrested and charged.

That's one way of saying it. Another way to say it would be: "Carter Page's testimony contradicts the unverified, third-hand hearsay information contained in the dossier, as he expressly denied meeting either of those officials. As to contacts with Russians unrelated to information contained in

the Steele dossier, Page confirmed that he spoke with Arkady Dvorkovich and met with Andrey Baranov."

But we don't have to take Page's word for it, nor should we. If there is evidence to the contrary, Page should quite rightly be arrested and charged with, at a minimum, lying to the HPSCI and to the FBI. Were there evidence or corroboration to confirm illicit engagements with Sechin and Divyekin, as reported in the dossier and declared to be credible by the FBI/DOJ officials testifying to the FISC judge, Page is dead to rights.

Yet Page walks free. The absence of evidence sufficient to arrest and charge Page with lying about his alleged treasonous and conspiratorial activities, coupled with the critical role those very allegations played in convincing a judge to approve a FISA warrant targeting his communications, leaves Citizen Page in a rather unique state of judicial and political limbo.

Yet for Page to regain his battered reputation and get on with his life, the FBI, DOJ, and HPSCI Democrats will have to admit that the information provided to the court regarding his activities in Russia was wrong. In doing so, they would have to further admit that the rest of the information in the 35-page Steele dossier was tarnished, and inadmissible. That's not going to happen. We Refuted Something Republicans Never Said

The Schiff memo confirmed that the Steele dossier was used to obtain the warrant. It added nothing to suggest that the dossier information had been corroborated. The Democrats aren't talking about this part of their memo on cable news shows, because they would like you to forget it.

Democrats believe their immediate future depends on a positive (for them) outcome of the Robert Mueller investigation into Russian influence on the election.

What they are talking about—a lot—is their refutation of a phantom Republican claim that the dossier triggered the FBI investigation. The Republicans made no such claim, but Schiff and his colleagues are nonetheless eager to address this straw man at every opportunity. Why? Because their focus isn't on Page's civil rights, or even on his possible guilt. They don't seem to have much of an opinion on these either way.

Their focus is on the future, and the Democrats believe their immediate future depends on a positive (for them) outcome of the Robert Mueller investigation into Russian influence on the election. They fear the slightest acquiescence to doubt about the validity of the Steele dossier will somehow impact that investigation, and their future. Page is just some guy in the way.

In advance of the release of the Schiff memo, I wrote here that the only question it needed to answer was whether the Steele dossier information used against Page had been corroborated and validated prior to its use in the FISA court. That question was answered, albeit not intentionally. The

information was not corroborated or validated. Although Schiff and his colleagues will do everything they can to convince you otherwise, it's the only thing that matters.

Jason Beale (a pseudonym) is a retired U.S. Army interrogator and strategic debriefer with 30 years experience in military and intelligence interrogation and human intelligence collection operations. He's on Twitter @jabeale.

EXCLUSIVE: FBI Denies Secret Comey-Obama Meeting Raises Integrity And Public Trust Issues

By Richard Pollock

Daily Caller, March 1, 2018

The FBI states it will not expedite the release of documents about secret meetings between FBI Director James Comey and former President Barack Obama, according to a letter the bureau sent to The Daily Caller News Foundation.

Such information is not "a matter of widespread and exceptional media interest in which there exists possible questions about the government's integrity which affects public confidence," David Hardy, the Section Chief for the bureau's Record/Information Dissemination Section, told TheDCNF in a Feb. 26 letter.

TheDCNF, under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), requested records of all meetings between Comey and Obama and sought an "expedited process" as provided under the act when issues are of great interest to the media and the records address issues pertaining to government integrity. TheDCNF FOIA request was filed Feb. 16, 2018.

The issue prompting the FOIA request was the disclosure Comey held a secret Oval Office meeting with Obama on Jan. 5, 2017. Comey never divulged the meeting to Congress. (RELATED: Comey Held Secret Obama White House Meeting Before Inauguration)

Susan Rice, Obama's national security adviser, former deputy Attorney General Sally Yates, and former Vice President Joe Biden also attended the meeting.

The National Archives revealed the existence of the meeting and released a declassified version of an email Rice sent to the Senate Committee on the Judiciary. Rice wrote an email to herself about the secret Jan. 5 meeting with Comey on Inauguration Day Jan. 20, 2017 as President Donald Trump was being sworn into office. The email suggested Comey may have misled Congress and was attempting to cover up the extent of his relationship with Obama.

Christopher Bedford, TheDCNF's editor-in-chief called the FBI denial "shameful."

"The FBI just told us that Director James Comey potentially lying to Congress should not be of interest to us, that it doesn't speak to their 'integrity,' and that it shouldn't impact America's 'confidence' in them," Bedford said. "They

said this with a straight face. We disagree, we think the American people disagree, and we think it's absolutely shameful."

Republican Sens. Chuck Grassley, chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee and subcommittee chairman, and Lindsey Graham released the Rice email after they received it from the National Archives.

"President Obama had a brief follow-on conversation with FBI Director Comey and Deputy Attorney General Sally Yates in the Oval Office," Rice stated in the email on Jan. 5.

The President urged Comey to proceed "by the book" on the Russian investigation, according to Rice.

Grassley of Iowa and Graham of South Carolina wrote to Rice in a Feb. 8 letter saying the email seemed "odd" to them.

"It strikes us as odd that, among your activities in the final moments on the final day of the Obama administration, you would feel the need to send yourself such an unusual email purporting to document a conversation involving President Obama," the two wrote.

"Despite your claim that President Obama repeatedly told Mr. Comey to proceed 'by the book,' substantial questions have arisen about whether officials at the FBI, as well as at the Justice Department and the State Department, actually did proceed 'by the book,'" the two senators continued.

Comey claimed in June 8, 2017, testimony before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence he had only two face-to-face meetings with the president in which they were alone.

"I spoke alone with President Obama twice in person (and never on the phone) – once in 2015 to discuss law enforcement policy issues and a second time, briefly, for him to say goodbye in late 2016," Comey's opening statement read.

The qualifier that he had meetings with Obama "alone" permitted the former director to suggest he only met with the former president on two occasions.

TheDCNF filed its FOIA request before the bureau "seeking records that identify and describe all meetings between former FBI Director James Comey and President Barack Obama. This records request is for all meetings with President Obama alone or with meetings with the President in the company of other administration officials."

TheDCNF requested records to include all Comey "logs, director appointment schedules, emails and memos outlining the meetings with the former President along with administration officials," adding, the records "should list the date of the meeting, location, topic and meeting participants."

TheDCNF stated it sought an "expedited request" for producing the records.

"The issue of Director Comey's meetings with President Obama is a key troubling issue for Senate Judiciary

Chairman Chuck Grassley," TheDCNF wrote in its application for the expedited processing. TheDCNF attached to Grassly-Graham letter to Rice in the FOIA request for expediting handling.

Hardy said TheDCNF failed to meet its standards for expedited processing as provided under 28 CFR 16.5 (e)(1)(iv).

"You have not provided enough information concerning the statutory requirements permitting expedition; therefore your request is denied," he told TheDCNF.

Report Alleging House Intel Committee Leaked Senate Intel Russia Probe Texts Is Questioned

By Dan Boylan

Washington Times, March 1, 2018

A report alleging Republicans on the House Intelligence Committee leaked to the media Russian election meddling investigation texts by the Senate Intelligence Committee's top Democrat has been disputed by a key lawmaker.

According to The New York Times, last month the committee's Republican chairman, Sen. Richard Burr of North Carolina, and its top Democrat, Sen. Mark Warner of Virginia, were so angered by a media leak that they discussed the issue with House Speaker Paul D. Ryan, in addition to venting larger concerns about the House Intelligence Committee and its chairman, Rep. Devin Nunes.

On Thursday, Mr. Burr denied The New York Times report, telling CNN that his committee had not concluded that House Republicans were behind the leak. He also denied discussing concerns about Mr. Nunes with Mr. Ryan.

A spokesman for Mr. Nunes also lashed out at the story.

"The New York Times, a prominent purveyor of leaks, is highlighting anonymous sources leaking information that accuses Republicans of leaking information," spokesman Jack Langer said in statement on Thursday. "I'm not sure if this coverage could possibly get more absurd."

According to the report in question, Mr. Burr and Mr. Warner were angered that text messages were published by Fox News last month between Mr. Warner and lobbyist Adam Waldman, whose firm reportedly has ties to former Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton and Oleg Deripaska, a businessman with alleged ties to the Russian mafia.

The texts were an effort by Mr. Warner to contact Christopher Steele, the ex-British intelligence officer behind the notorious anti-Trump dossier alleging long-standing connections between the Kremlin and President Trump's campaign.

Mr. Waldman reportedly provided copies of the texts to the Senate Intelligence Committee. Staff for Mr. Nunes then asked for copies to be shared with the House Intelligence

Committee. Several days later, the texts were reported by Fox News.

While the report caused Mr. Trump to question why Mr. Warner would want a private meeting with Mr. Steele, at the time, Mr. Warner and Mr. Burr condemned the leaks in a joint statement calling it "incomplete information" taken out of context.

Another Republican committee member, Sen. Marco Rubio of Florida, tweeted: "Sen. Warner fully disclosed this to the committee four months ago. Has had zero impact on our work."

Both the House and Senate Intelligence Committees are conducting probes into Russian meddling in the 2016 election.

The Senate probe has been widely acknowledged as a bipartisan effort. The House effort, however, has been marked by such serious partisan infighting that the committee is expected to issue two separate reports on its findings — one by Republicans and one by Democrats.

Senate Intelligence Leaders Say House G.O.P. Leaked A Senator's Texts

By Nicholas Fandos

New York Times, March 1, 2018

WASHINGTON — The Senate Intelligence Committee has concluded that Republicans on the House Intelligence Committee were behind the leak of private text messages between the Senate panel's top Democrat and a Russian-connected lawyer, according to two congressional officials briefed on the matter.

Senator Richard M. Burr of North Carolina, the committee's Republican chairman, and Senator Mark Warner of Virginia, the top Democrat, were so perturbed by the leak that they demanded a rare meeting with Speaker Paul D. Ryan last month to inform him of their findings. They used the meeting with Mr. Ryan to raise broader concerns about the direction of the House Intelligence Committee under its chairman, Representative Devin Nunes of California, the officials said.

To the senators, who are overseeing what is effectively the last bipartisan investigation on Capitol Hill into Russia's interference in the 2016 election, the leak was a serious breach of protocol and a partisan attack by one intelligence committee against the other.

The messages between Mr. Warner and Adam Waldman, a Washington lawyer, show that the senator tried for weeks to arrange a meeting with Christopher Steele, the former British spy who assembled a dossier of salacious claims about connections between Mr. Trump, his associates and Russia. The Senate committee has had difficulty making contact with Mr. Steele, whom it views as a key witness. And

Mr. Waldman, who knew Mr. Steele, presented himself as a willing partner.

The texts were leaked just days after the same House Republicans had taken the extraordinary step of publicly releasing, over the objections of the F.B.I., a widely disputed memorandum based on sensitive government secrets. Taken together, the actions suggested a pattern of partisanship and unilateral action by the once-bipartisan House panel.

Fox News published the texts, which were sent via a secure messaging application, in early February. President Trump and other Republicans loyal to him quickly jumped on the report to try to discredit Mr. Warner, suggesting that the senator was acting surreptitiously to try to talk to Mr. Steele.

"Wow! -Senator Mark Warner got caught having extensive contact with a lobbyist for a Russian oligarch," Mr. Trump wrote at the time. "Warner did not want a 'paper trail' on a 'private' meeting (in London) he requested with Steele of fraudulent Dossier fame."

"All tied into Crooked Hillary," Mr. Trump added.

The Fox News article made prominent mention of work by Mr. Waldman's Washington lobbying firm on behalf of Oleg V. Deripaska, a Russian aluminum magnate who was once close to Paul Manafort, Mr. Trump's indicted former campaign chairman.

Copies of the messages were originally submitted by Mr. Waldman to the Senate committee. In January, one of Mr. Nunes's staff members requested that copies be shared with the House committee as well, according to a person familiar with the request who was not authorized to talk about it publicly. Days later, the messages were published by Fox News, the person said. Fox's report said that it had obtained the documents from a Republican source it did not name.

The documents published by Fox News appear to back up the senators' accusation. Though they were marked "CONFIDENTIAL: Produced to USSSCI on a Confidential Basis," suggesting that they had come from the Senate panel, known as the United States Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, the person familiar with the congressional requests said that the stamp was misleading and that other markings gave away their actual origin.

Specifically, the copy of the messages shared with the Senate had page numbers, and the one submitted to the House — while preserving the reference to the Senate committee — did not.

A lawyer for Mr. Waldman independently concluded that the House committee had probably shared the document and sent a letter to Mr. Nunes complaining about the leak, according to a person familiar with the letter.

Mr. Burr appeared to make a veiled reference to the texts during a public hearing with the heads of the government's intelligence agencies last month.

"There have been times where information has found its way out, some of it recent, where it didn't come from us, but

certainly people have portrayed it did," he said. "And that's O.K., because you know and we know the security measures we've got in place to protect the sensitivity of that material."

In a statement, a spokesman for Mr. Nunes, Jack Langer, did not dispute that the committee had leaked the messages, but called the premise of this article "absurd."

"The New York Times, a prominent purveyor of leaks, is highlighting anonymous sources leaking information that accuses Republicans of leaking information," he said. "I'm not sure if this coverage could possibly get more absurd."

AshLee Strong, a spokeswoman for Mr. Ryan, released a statement after this article was published, saying, "The speaker heard the senators on their concerns and encouraged them to take them up directly with their counterparts."

In his meeting with the senators, Mr. Ryan told them that he did not run the committee himself, the officials briefed on the encounter said.

Members of the Senate Intelligence Committee were briefed on their conclusions in recent weeks and on the meeting with Mr. Ryan.

In a joint statement, Mr. Burr and Mr. Warner acknowledged the meeting with Mr. Ryan and said they had not requested that the speaker take any specific action.

Mr. Waldman, the lawyer who communicated with Mr. Warner, could not be reached for comment.

The incident makes clear just how far the two intelligence committees — generally considered secretive refuges from the politics of Capitol Hill — have diverged over the course of their Russia investigations.

In the House, Republicans and Democrats have been consumed by partisan sniping, airing grievances on television and in the press, while the pace of witness interviews has slowed to a crawl. Democrats have repeatedly accused Mr. Nunes of using his position to protect Mr. Trump from the investigation.

The House committee spent much of the last month locked in a bitter dispute over the secret Republican memorandum, which accused top F.B.I. and Justice Department officials of abusing their powers to spy on one of Mr. Trump's former campaign advisers. Republicans released the document over the objections of the Justice Department and the F.B.I., which warned in a rare public statement that it was dangerously misleading.

Democrats called the document reckless and said it was merely a political tool to tarnish the agencies investigating Mr. Trump's potential ties to Russia. They eventually released their own memo, drawn from the same underlying material, rebutting it.

The Senate committee has conducted its investigation primarily in private, and Mr. Burr and Mr. Warner remained in lock step both publicly and privately. When Fox News published Mr. Warner's texts, for example, an aide to Mr. Burr

told the network that he had been aware of Mr. Warner's contacts with Mr. Waldman, and the two senators issued a joint statement condemning the leak.

Senator Marco Rubio, Republican of Florida and another member of the Intelligence Committee, also defended Mr. Warner.

And while Mr. Nunes's memo consumed Republicans in the House, as well as officials in the White House, Mr. Burr largely steered clear of it. He told CNN it ought not to have been released, and in private he discounted it.

In the hearing with the intelligence chiefs last month, he sought to draw a distinction between his committee's approach and that of the House.

"I promised you when we started a year ago that the sensitive nature of that material would, in fact, be protected," he said. "The vice chairman and I have done everything in our power to do that."

Trump Ignored 'Bright Line' On Discussing Russia With Hicks

'The president has put her in a very precarious position,' a senior administration official said.

By Darren Samuelsohn And Eliana Johnson
Politico, March 1, 2018

President Donald Trump's lawyers have urged him not to discuss details of the unfolding Russia investigation with anyone outside his legal team, warning of a conversational "bright line" that could put aides and associates in legal jeopardy, according to current and former Trump aides.

But Trump often ignores that legal advice in the presence of senior aides — including his departing confidante and White House communications director, Hope Hicks.

"I think the president has put her in a very precarious position," a senior Trump administration official said in a recent interview.

Hicks is not alone. Current and former Trump aides describe a president who often fails to observe boundaries about the Russia probe and who calls staffers into his office and raises the subject without warning.

Hicks in particular, Trump told her, could be "on both sides of the [bright] line." As one of his longest-serving and most trusted aides, Hicks may have been subjected to an unwelcome amount of legally relevant comments from the president.

Speaking freely about an ongoing investigation is a major mistake, say veteran defense attorneys with White House experience.

"Every defense lawyer will advise his client don't talk to people about the facts of the case. But when you work for the president and the president is not only constantly talking, but tweeting, I'm sure that's doubly difficult," said William Jeffress, a Washington attorney who represented former President

Richard M. Nixon after his resignation and I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby, former senior aide under President George W. Bush.

That concept is not lost on White House officials. "People are afraid to talk to each other," Anthony Scaramucci, who served a very brief stint as White House communications director before Hicks, told CNN on Thursday.

But there is little they can do about a president both consumed with allegations against him and resistant to advice about what subjects he should avoid discussing.

The problem is especially acute for Hicks and other aides subjected to Trump's venting, given special counsel Robert Mueller's known interest in whether Trump has sought to obstruct justice from within the White House.

Hicks' exit from the White House in the coming weeks will hardly immunize her from legal headaches. But it will spare her from "learning more things on the inside that could potentially lead to a second or third visit to the special counsel's office and higher legal bills," as one former Trump aide put it.

The former Trump aide, who experienced firsthand the lack of discipline in the president's discussions about Russia matters, said the situation stemmed in part from the unique nature of a White House that "runs on personal access and loyalty."

"Part of the problem in this White House is you have, every day, people who engage in matters concerning this investigation," the source said. "That is problematic, because not only does it distract from the work that taxpayers are paying them to do, but it also — in certain instances — can make them witnesses or potentially targets of the investigation. That's really dangerous."

A nightmare scenario for a White House staffer might resemble the saga of Bettie Currie, a personal secretary to President Bill Clinton. Amid an investigation into his affair with Monica Lewinsky, Clinton had a private 1998 conversation with Currie about her memories of his contacts with the White House intern — a talk that prosecutors suspected was an effort at illegal witness manipulation. Currie denied that Clinton had coached her, but later said that "[d]espite my telling them over and over and over again ... they didn't believe me."

Hicks, by virtue of her longtime close relationship with Trump, has already become a significant figure in the multiple probes into Russian election meddling and alleged Kremlin influence over Trump's campaign. She met in December with special counsel Robert Mueller and spent nearly nine hours testifying before the House Intelligence Committee on Tuesday. Hicks also has appeared before the Senate Intelligence Committee.

Hicks is known to have been present or involved in several key episodes of interest to federal Russia investigators. Mueller has questioned her about a meeting on Air Force One as Trump returned from a July trip to Europe,

in which Trump, his aides and family members crafted a misleading statement about a June 2016 Trump Tower meeting organized by his son, Donald Trump Jr., with a Russian lawyer offering dirt on Hillary Clinton.

She was also with Trump in March 2016 when he first announced that Carter Page and George Papadopoulos were joining his campaign's foreign policy team; both men have since become focal points of the current Mueller and congressional investigations.

Hicks was on email chains involving Page as he ran an invitation to speak in Moscow up the campaign's chain of command. She fielded media inquiries for Paul Manafort, who at the time served as campaign chairman, about his ties to Oleg Deripaska, a Russian aluminum magnate and ally to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Serving in Trump's White House inner circle also meant Hicks was with the president in Bedminster, New Jersey, during an early May 2017 weekend when he decided to fire FBI Director James Comey — a move that triggered Mueller's investigation and has put Trump under the special counsel's scrutiny for potential obstruction of justice.

The Washington Post reported last fall that Hicks was also with the president in the Oval Office a day before Comey's ouster, during a discussion about a letter drafted by aide Stephen Miller that spelled out the president's reasons for firing the FBI chief. She was the only Trump aide present during a July interview Trump gave The New York Times in which he described his anger that Attorney General Jeff Sessions had recused himself from the Russia probe — another potential component of an obstruction of justice case.

White House aides and a friend of Hicks on Wednesday insisted her departure isn't connected solely to the Russia probe, noting it had been under discussion for weeks.

"She'll be incredibly difficult to replace," said White House attorney Ty Cobb, who has been serving as the official point man for the president's response to the Russia probe. "She couldn't have been a more supportive or talented ally to me."

Still, the timing of her exit announcement — the day after her House testimony, during which she reportedly acknowledged telling small lies to cover for the president — stirred suspicion.

Even after she surrenders her White House badge, Hicks might not be finished speaking to federal investigators. Former senior White House aides Reince Priebus, Steve Bannon and Sean Spicer have all met with Mueller's team since their White House departures. And Mark Corallo, a former spokesman for Trump's legal team, met with Mueller last month.

"It's so easy to get caught up in these things, even if you have nothing substantive to do with decisions," said Adam Goldberg, a Bill Clinton White House lawyer who

handled crisis communications during the Monica Lewinsky scandal.

"Just being on a phone call, even if you might disagree with everyone, that's a one-way ticket to the grand jury," Goldberg added.

GOP: Russian Trolls Pushed Pro- And Anti U.S. Energy Messages

By Anthony Adragna

Politico, March 1, 2018

Russian internet trolls ran a social media campaign targeting controversial U.S. energy projects — but the effort appeared to be designed to stir up anger among both environmental and pro-oil activists, according to a report that congressional Republicans released Thursday.

The report released by Rep. Lamar Smith's House Science Committee fell short of proving the Texas lawmaker's longstanding charge that Moscow had backed green groups in a bid to undermine the boom in U.S. oil and gas production.

The Internet Research Agency, a Kremlin-linked Russian troll farm, issued thousands of posts on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram between 2015-2107 that focused on energy and environmental issues, especially targeting the Dakota Access Pipeline, which drew protests from greens and Native American groups.

"Love water not oil," read one of the posts from February last year featuring a picture of a young girl looking over a prairie landscape, next to text opposing pipelines, fracking and tar sands.

But other messages criticized the pipeline protesters, and the group pushed posts both calling for action on climate change and to support oil production.

"I don't care what ecologists say. Texas is the top oil producing state, and I'm [] proud of it! Let's douse the Yankees with it and then just throw a burning match," read one such message from a group named "Heart of Texas," the same name as a group that stirred anti-Islam rallies with its internet posts.

Despite his previous contention that Russian interference was designed to disrupt U.S. energy development, Smith told reporters on Thursday he wasn't surprised to postings on both sides of various energy issues. The efforts by the Russians were clearly trying to sow discord to prevent projects from being completed or policies from being enacted, he said.

"By stirring up both sides, clearly they saw that as something that could benefit them," he said.

Smith had previously contended that Russia was bankrolling anti-fracking groups, and he wrote to Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, calling for him to investigate

Russia's "radical statements and vitriol directed at the U.S. fossil fuel sector."

Russian accounts went beyond Dakota Access to also post about the Sabal Trail, Keystone XL, Colonial, Bayou Bridge and Enbridge Line 5 pipelines. The Russian embassy did not respond to questions about the report.

Russians Used Social Media To Stir Divisions On U.S. Energy Policy: Lawmakers

By Timothy Gardner

Reuters, March 1, 2018

Full-text stories from Reuters currently cannot be included in this document. You may, however, click the link above to access the story.

As Russia Subverts America, Where's Trump?

USA Today, March 1, 2018

When presidents take office, they vow "to the best of my ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution" and, by extension, the nation. It's the only oath specifically spelled out in the supreme law of the United States.

Implicit in that oath, a unanimous Supreme Court held in 1972, is the power to "protect our government against those who would subvert ... it by unlawful means."

Subverting the U.S. government is precisely what a coterie of Russians and Russian entities did in the 2016 presidential election, according to the indictment filed last month by special counsel Robert Mueller.

And the subversion continues. An army of Russian bots, or automated accounts on social media, were used to inflame public emotions over gun control after the school shooting in Parkland, Fla. America's intelligence chiefs fully expect Russian President Vladimir Putin's digital siege to target November's midterm elections.

Yet President Trump has done woefully little to counter the Russian attack on America's democracy. Don't believe us? Just ask his own National Security Agency chief.

In astonishing testimony before the Senate this week, Adm. Michael Rogers said America's premier cyber-warfare branch has the ability to help counter Russian hacking efforts, but has never been ordered to do so by Trump.

"We're taking steps, but we're probably not doing enough," Rogers said. The Russians, he added, "haven't paid a price, at least that's sufficient to get them to change their behavior."

In response, White House spokeswoman Sarah Huckabee Sanders repeated a ludicrous assertion that Trump "has been tougher on Russia" than his predecessor.

President Obama surely could have done more, but at least he alerted Americans to the Russian interference, demanded that Putin back off, imposed sanctions, seized Russian diplomatic compounds, and ordered the expulsion of diplomats.

Trump, who continues to denounce Mueller's investigation as a witch hunt, has done none of these things in response to Putin's campaign of subversion. Trump actually feigned gratitude when the Russian president responded to congressional sanctions by ordering the U.S. Embassy in Moscow slashed by 755 people.

And Trump — who by one count has insulted more than 400 people, places and things on Twitter since he declared his candidacy — exercises astonishing discipline in withholding any condemnation of Putin, who on Thursday delivered a bellicose speech touting his nation's new nuclear capabilities.

The nation awaits Mueller's determination as to whether the Trump presidential campaign colluded with Russia during the run-up to the 2016 election, along with any evidence that Trump violated the law or his oath of office.

In the meantime, in the absence of forceful presidential leadership, it's up to Congress, the states and intelligence agencies to do the best they can to protect and defend America from Moscow's information warfare.

Trump-Russia Claim Rings Hollow

By Christopher Buskirk

USA Today, March 1, 2018

The Trump-Russia narrative has entered its final phase. Like the rhinovirus that causes the common cold, it has mutated rapidly since the public was first exposed to it in 2016. Infection has been most common in elite coastal communities such as New York, San Francisco and, of course, Washington, D.C. But it has just about run its course.

The latest mutation claims that President Trump is violating his oath of office by failing to take strong steps or publicly acknowledge Russian activity in American politics. The claim rings hollow to those not already strongly invested in this Beltway fable. Yes, Russian forces bought ads and sponsored rallies before and after the 2016 election. Some were critical of Hillary Clinton, others of Donald Trump. Noted Trump critic Michael Moore was even a guest of honor at one of the anti-Trump rallies paid for by Russian trolls.

How do we know this? Because special prosecutor Robert Mueller indicted 13 of them for violating American election law. Was the Trump campaign implicated in any way? No. In fact, Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein emphasized that the indictment made no connection. And who appointed Mueller? Rosenstein, a career prosecutor appointed to his position by Trump. In short, these 13 Russian trolls are being prosecuted by the Trump administration. On what basis then is President Trump in violation of his oath? The answer is easy: none.

Such claims are transparent attempts to transform political disputes into legal ones. It amounts to the criminalization of politics, and it is a dangerous path down which this country must not go.

For Trump opponents there is one answer, and it is not peddling variations on the Trump-Russia narrative. It is the ballot box. But that's a risky proposition for the president's accusers because the last time they made a big electoral bet against Trump, they lost.

Christopher Buskirk, editor and publisher of the online journal American Greatness, is co-author of *American Greatness: How Conservatism, Inc. Missed the 2016 Election & What the D.C. Establishment Needs to Learn*.

Rick Gates Nixes Family Trip To Boston After Threats

By Josh Gerstein

Politico, March 1, 2018

Rick Gates, the former Trump campaign aide who entered a guilty plea last week and agreed to cooperate with special counsel Robert Mueller's investigation, is canceling a planned family trip to Boston because of threatening comments posted online.

Gates, who is under court supervision while he awaits sentencing, said in a court filing submitted by his attorney on Thursday that media coverage of his request to take his children on a spring break trip to visit Revolutionary War sites this month led to worrisome online reaction.

"After entry of the Court's Order, Boston newspapers published stories that Mr. Gates and his family would be visiting Boston," attorney Thomas Green wrote. "Publication of that fact generated comments on the internet, some of which were of a threatening character. As a result, Mr. Gates and his wife believe it is not prudent to travel to Boston with their children."

Green pointed to a Feb. 26 article in *The Boston Globe* about the planned trip. "Bring a food taster," one commenter posted. "Gates makes another stable genius decision. His kids will never forget this trip," another added.

Because of the comments, Gates proposed taking his family to another location, which was not disclosed in public court filings. Mueller's office did not object to the initial travel request nor to the subsequent one, Green said.

U.S. District Court Judge Amy Berman Jackson granted the motion for the revised trip on Thursday afternoon. She did not explain her reasoning.

Last Friday, Gates pleaded guilty to charges of conspiracy and making false statements in connection with Mueller's ongoing Russia investigation. He faces a likely sentence of about 4½ to six years in prison, but could see that time shortened substantially in exchange for his cooperation.

Gates is free on \$5 million bail but needs court permission for most travel outside the area of Richmond, Virginia, where he lives. With consent that Mueller gave in the wake of last week's plea, Jackson also agreed this week to

end a requirement that Gates wear a GPS tracking device at all times.

Trump Wants To Pass Out Billions For Rural Infrastructure. But What Counts As 'Rural'?

By Michael Laris

Washington Post, February 28, 2018

A centerpiece of the Trump administration's infrastructure proposal is the promise to swiftly inject billions into rural infrastructure projects.

But the way Trump officials propose to do that is already raising questions on Capitol Hill, with some saying the administration is seeking to use untested and potentially politicized means to dole out the federal funds.

Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao pushed for support of the package, which also aims to speed projects by curtailing environmental reviews, in testimony before a Senate committee Thursday.

Despite bipartisan calls for improving America's transportation networks, water systems and other infrastructure, the president's 10-year, \$200-billion proposal faces deep political uncertainty amid a poisoned political environment. It comes after vast tax cuts last year sharply limited the fiscal breathing room for what had been touted as one of Trump's signature initiatives.

The rural infrastructure proposal calls for \$40 billion to be sent to governors in block grants using a new federal formula that, according to administration budget documents, will be "calculated based on rural lane miles and rural population adjusted to reflect policy objectives."

There are numerous federal definitions for what constitutes "rural." Exactly how Trump's metrics, including one tied to the length of rural roads, would be used remains unclear, raising concerns among some that they could unfairly disadvantage even states with large rural areas.

"It's really an unusual kind of way to calculate a rural formula," said one congressional official who has examined the proposal. "It's odd, because you're using rural-road lane miles, and yet the funding isn't specific to roads in any way."

Indeed, projects eligible for Trump's proposed infusion of cash stretch far beyond transportation to include water and waste water, electricity production and transmission, and broadband.

White House officials have signaled that the rural funds are a top priority. An additional \$10 billion would go to states via competitive rural grants. Heavily rural states were among candidate Trump's most reliable sources of support.

His infrastructure proposal also includes a separate, \$100-billion incentives program, where states can apply for money to help close local funding gaps.

But the rural plan takes precedence.

While the rest of the money would ramp up over the coming years, "the rural funds are advanced and moved faster ... There's a front-loading of the rural funds," a White House official said earlier this month in previewing the administration's budget.

That fiscal blueprint also called for deep cuts in existing transportation and other infrastructure spending, including for transit projects nationwide.

"It's no surprise their political base gets the money fast, and everybody else has to beg the administration to support their project," said a Democratic congressional aide.

Deputy White House press secretary Lindsay Walters said Trump is keen to hash out the details with both parties.

"There are no red states or blue states in the president's infrastructure vision," Walters said, citing multiple bipartisan meetings he's held with congressional, state and local officials.

"What is most important to President Trump is that America's rural areas receive the help they so desperately need to rebuild their communities and reconnect to the national and international economy," she added. "We are fully open to discussing with the Hill what the best way is to achieve that goal."

Chao sought momentum for the administration's plan at Thursday's hearing, held before the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works. Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works, R.D. James, who was confirmed last month and oversees the Army Corps of Engineers, also testified.

The Corps of Engineers plays a key role in permitting roads and many other projects. Chao and other officials have pushed to speed up the Corps' approval processes. The administration delayed, by two years, an Obama-era rule on regulating wetlands and tributaries.

Chao was pressed for specifics on the rural program. Sen. Deb Fischer (R-Neb.) noted the proposal's reference to rural lane miles and rural population.

"But how does the administration plan to define 'rural' for the purposes of this funding? I know, across the federal government, there are many, many definitions for rural. What are you specifically looking at?" Fischer asked.

"On the specific question, I have to confess, somebody told me but I cannot remember now for the life of me," Chao said. "Let me get you an answer back on that." Chao said she would provide more information on "the whole issue as to how we define it."

Asked about the additional information, a Department of Transportation spokesman did not provide specifics, saying the intention of the program is "to provide needed resources to areas that are clearly rural in terms of proximity to urban areas and population density. The rural formula will ensure that funding is provided to the rural areas that need it most."

Trump Backs Compromise Deal On Biofuels Policy: Source

By Jarrett Renshaw

[Reuters](#), March 1, 2018

Full-text stories from Reuters currently cannot be included in this document. You may, however, click the link above to access the story.

Morning Brief

Friday, March 2, 2018

Heavy Rain/Flooding – February 19-25



From 3-8 inches of rainfall from February 19-25 has caused widespread flooding across large parts of Illinois, Indiana, Lower Michigan, and Ohio.

- Local damage assessments are ongoing across affected areas
- Several county and local roads remain closed to due high water/flooding
- R5 FEMA LNOs have demobilized
- Four (4) fatalities have been confirmed
 - (1) Illinois; (1) Ohio; (2) Indiana
- **SEOCs Status:** Illinois and Indiana remain at Partial Activation
- **ARC Shelters:** 11 open; 94 overnight occupants
- **Regional Power:** 143K customers without power as of 0500 CST

Outlook:

- Several affected areas are transitioning to recovery
- Local damage assessments will continue
- Many rivers across the Region will remain in, or will move into moderate to major flood stage over the next few days; weekend weather may slightly aggravate current river conditions

Severe Weather Total Precipitation - February 19-25, 2018



Hamilton County Illinois



Elkhart Central High School, Indiana



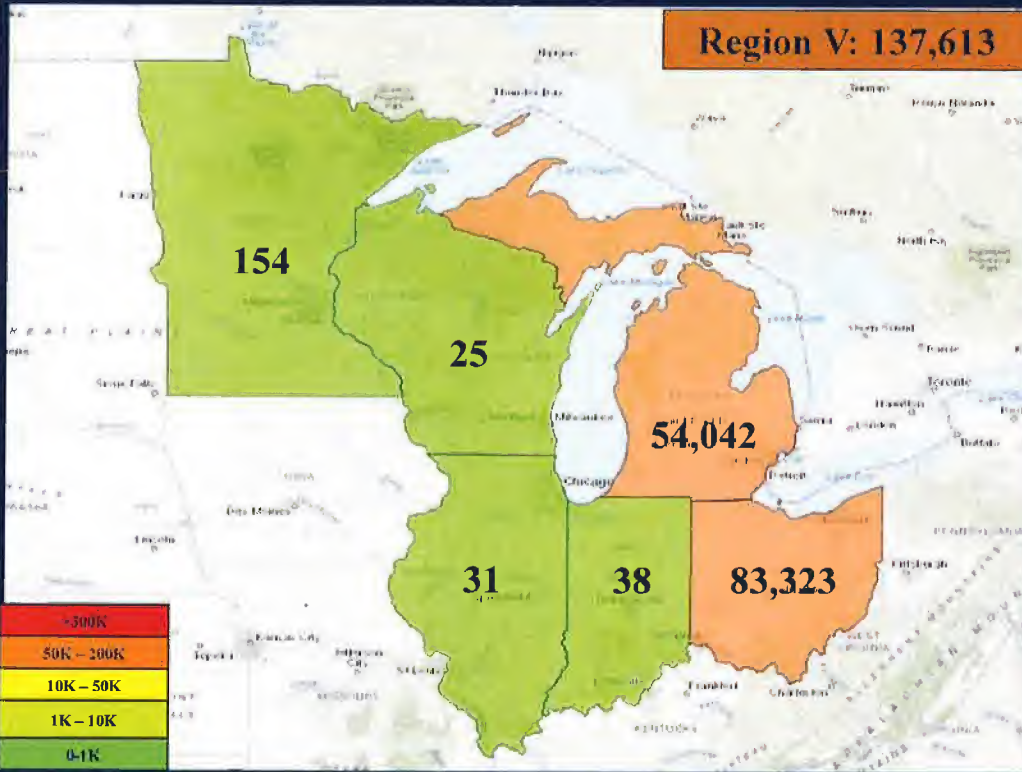
New Richmond, Ohio



Niles, Michigan

INFRASTRUCTURE STATUS

POWER OUTAGES



FEMA
REGION V



CONDITIONS & THREATS

	AIRPORT STATUS	ROADWAY STATUS	NUCLEAR FACILITIES
IL	ORD		
IN		southern/NW	
MI	DTW	southwest	
MN	MSP		
OH	CLE	southeast	
WI	MKE		
RV			
	EXCESSIVE SIGNIFICANT MODERATE LOW	MASS FLOODING FLOODING SNOW/ICE DEBRIS	GENERAL EMERGENCY SITE-SPECIFIC ALERT UNUSUAL EVENT

	GEOMAGNETIC STORMS	SOLAR RADIATION STORMS	RADIO BLACKOUTS
DAY 1	None	SI or GREATER	R1-R2 R3-R5
DAY 2	None		R1-R2 R3-R5
	G5 EXTREME G4 SEVERE G3 STRONG G2 MODERATE G1 MINOR	S5 EXTREME S4 SEVERE S3 STRONG S2 MODERATE S1 MINOR	R5 EXTREME R4 SEVERE R3 STRONG R2 MODERATE R1 MINOR

REGION V READINESS



OPERATIONS STATUS

RRCC	NORMAL OPERATIONS
RWC	NORMAL OPERATIONS
PRIMARY IMAT	AVAILABLE
DCE	AVAILABLE
LNO	AVAILABLE
NTAS	NORMAL OPERATIONS

STATE OPERATIONS STATUS

ILLINOIS	PARTIAL ACTIVATION (Flooding)
INDIANA	PARTIAL ACTIVATION (Flooding)
MICHIGAN	NORMAL OPERATIONS
MINNESOTA	NORMAL OPERATIONS
OHIO	NORMAL OPERATIONS - Assessment and Monitoring (Flooding)
WISCONSIN	NORMAL OPERATIONS

TRAINING & EXERCISES

TRAINING:

- **March 6-8:** Intro to Grants and Cooperative Agreements. Chicago, IL
- **Mar 7:** PowerPoint I (Beginner); Chicago, IL
- **Mar 8:** PowerPoint II (Intermediate); Chicago, IL
- **Mar 12-15:** PER-314 REP Exercise Evaluator Course (REEC); Indianapolis, IN
- **Mar 13:** FEMA Ethics Training; Chicago, IL
- **Mar 14:** Excel III (Advanced); Chicago, IL

EXERCISES:

- **Mar 7:** Braidwood REP Ex; Braidwood, IL
- **Mar 13:** Region V Power Outage Incident Annex (POIA) Seminar #2; Chicago, IL
- **Apr 24:** Palisades REP Ex; Van Buren Co, MI
- **May 8:** NMSZ Mass Care TTX; Chicago, IL

DISASTER DECLARATION STATUS

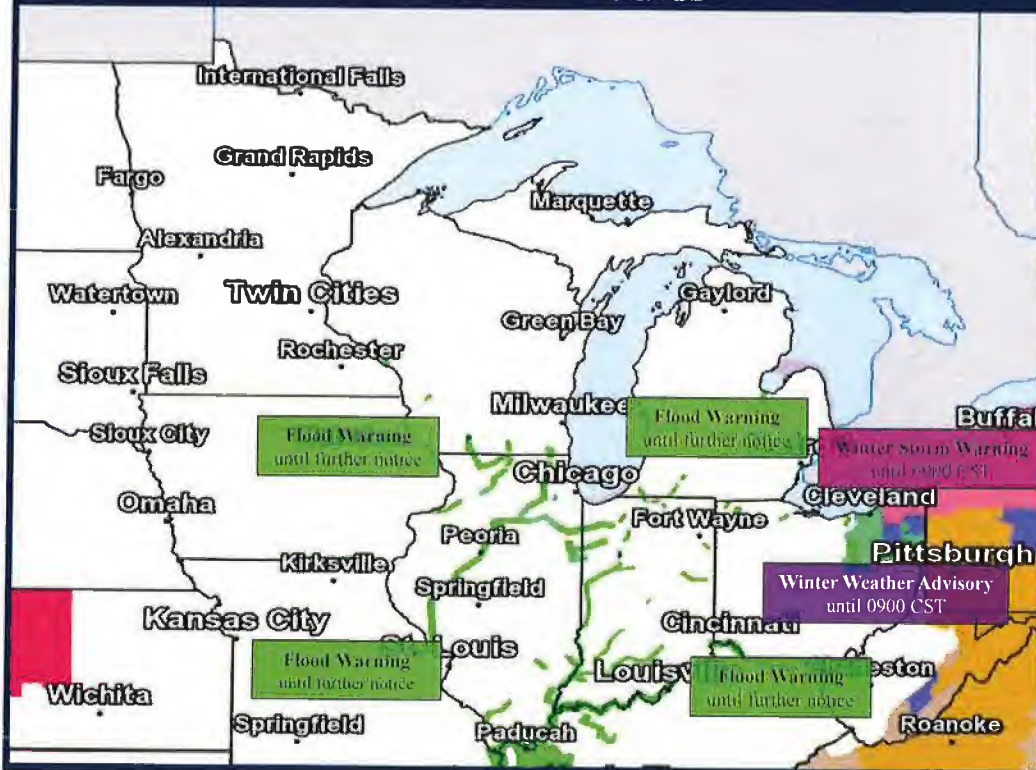
PDA SUMMARY: None

DECLARATION REQUESTS: None

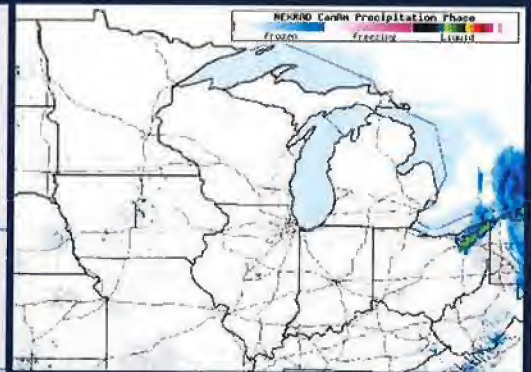
DECLARATIONS: FEMA-4343-DR-WI. On October 07, 2017 the President approved a Major Disaster Declaration for the State of Wisconsin as a result of severe storms, mudslides, flooding, and straight-line winds during the period of July 19-23. It provides Public Assistance for 11 counties (Buffalo, Crawford, Grant, Iowa, Jackson, La Crosse, Lafayette, Monroe, Richland, Trempealeau, and Vernon) and Hazard Mitigation statewide. FCO is Janet Odeshoo.

CURRENT WEATHER

WATCHES & WARNINGS



RADAR



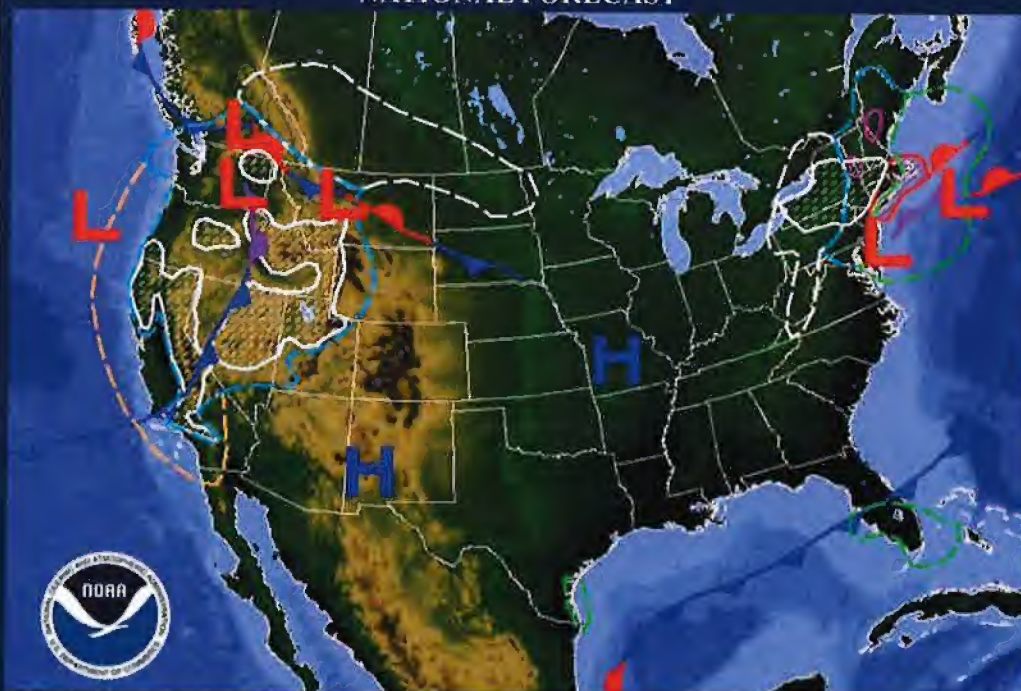
MAX TEMPERATURE



DAY 1 FORECAST

NATIONAL FORECAST

FEMA
REGION V



Day 1 National Forecast Chart

Valid Fri, Mar 02, 2018, issued 4:52 AM EST
DOC/NOAA/NWS-NCEP/Weather Prediction Center
Prepared by Moreynolds with WPC/SPC/NHC forecasts

Rain
Rain and T'Storms
Rain and Snow
Snow

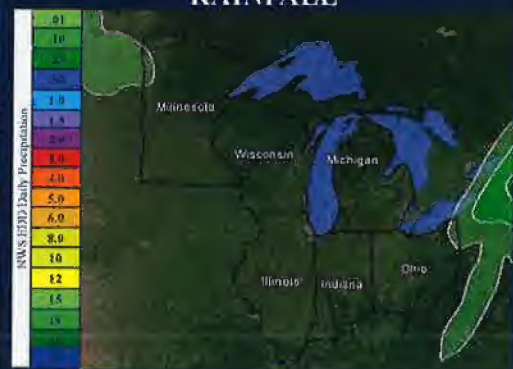
Flash Flooding Possible (hatched)
Severe T'Storms Possible (hatched)
Freezing Rain Possible (hatched)
Heavy Snow Possible (hatched)

SNOWFALL



No Icing Expected

RAINFALL



DAY 2 & 3 REGIONAL FORECAST



DAY 2 SNOWFALL



DAY 2 RAINFALL



DAY 3 SNOWFALL



DAY 3 RAINFALL



HYDROLOGIC OUTLOOK

RIVER FORECAST (9 GAUGES IN MAJOR)

FEMA
REGION V

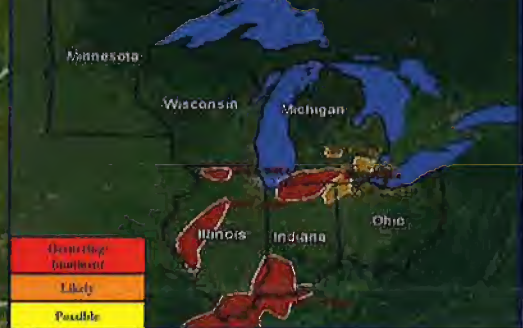


DAY 4-5 PRECIPITATION



SIG. RIVER FLOOD OUTLOOK

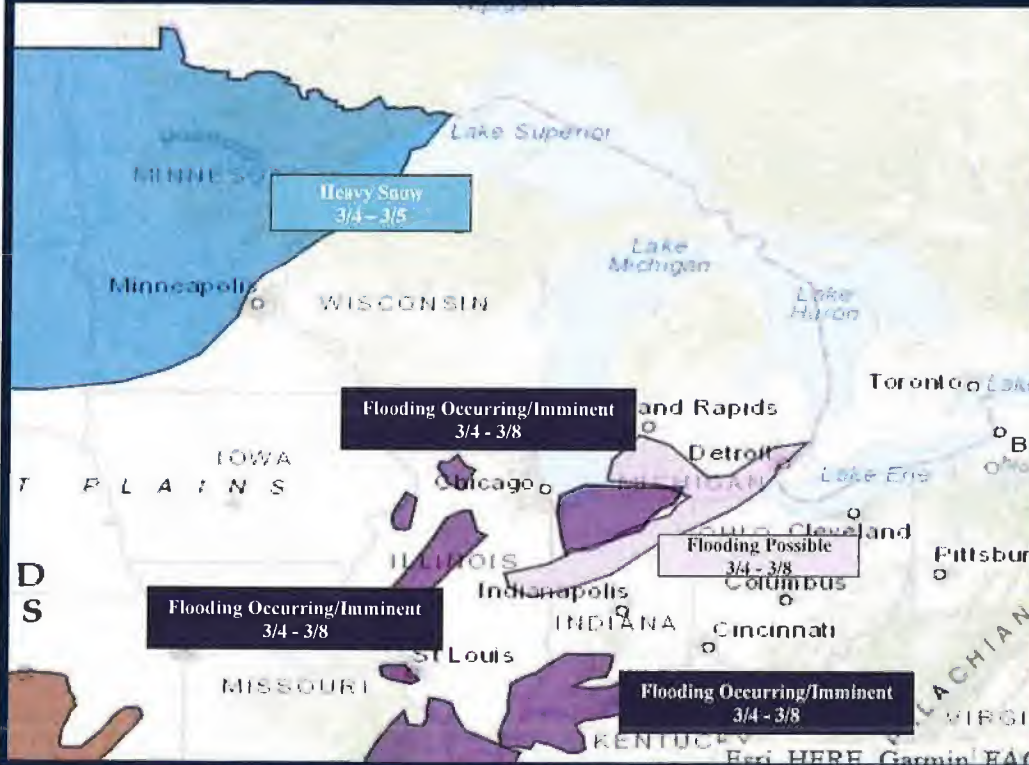
MAR 2 – MAR 6



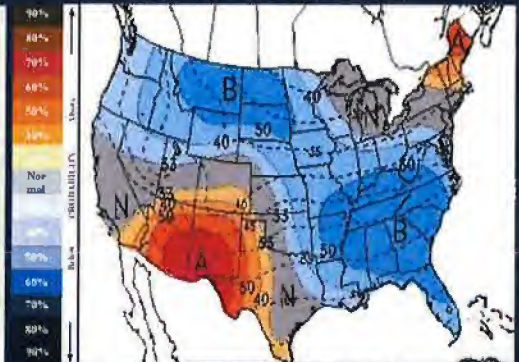
EXTENDED OUTLOOK

3-7 DAY HAZARDS

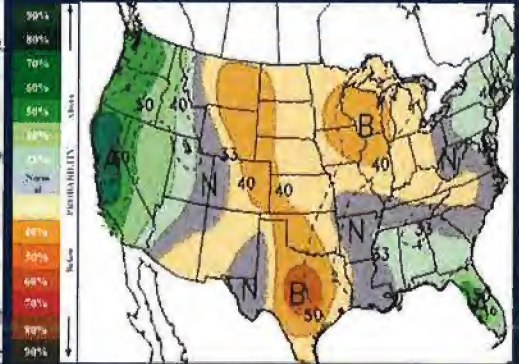
FEMA
REGION V



6-10 TEMPERATURE



6-10 PRECIPITATION





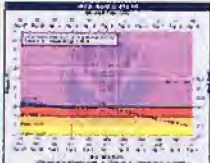
FEMA

Rock River at Moline

Rock Island County (County Population 147,546)



Current
13.8
02 Mar
Forecast
14
03 Mar



Friday	Friday Night	Saturday	Saturday Night
Partly Cloudy	Mostly Clear	Sunny	Mostly Clear
High: 43 °F	Low: 29 °F	High: 52 °F	Low: 45 °F
Flood Advisory	Flash Flood Watch		Flood Advisory

NWS	17.5	The Sears Dam is under water in Rock Island.
NWS	15.5	Water affects the intersection of Highways 150 and 6. Steel Dam is under water in Milan.
NWS	15.2	Water affects the lowest streets on Vanduffs Island.
NWS	15	Water affects business parking lots on 52nd Avenue in Moline. Water also affects most homes on South Shore Drive and North Shore Drive.
NWS	14	Water affects South Shore Drive and North Shore Drive in Moline west of the 27th Street bridge. Water limits access to homes on South Shore Drive east of the I-74 bridge.
NWS	13.2	Water affects 60th Street south of John Deere Road in Moline and 75th Ave from Green Valley Park 48th St. Water is on Canal Road in Big Island. Smith's Island is affected.
NWS	13	Water affects homes on South Shore Drive and cuts off access to homes east of the I-74 bridge. Water also affects 49th Avenue south of the theater. Water affects Vanduff Island.
NWS	12.5	Water affects some residences in the lower Friendship Farm area. 60th St is under water south of the Green Valley Sports Complex. 56th St along the north side of the river is under water.

Operations	Activity
------------	----------

NOT FOR BROADCAST

For Licensing Contact
mediadesk@svmichelle.com

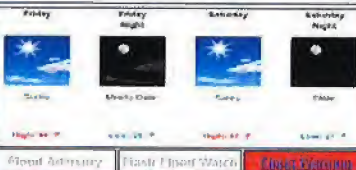
SVM MEDIA

Flood Hazard Zones

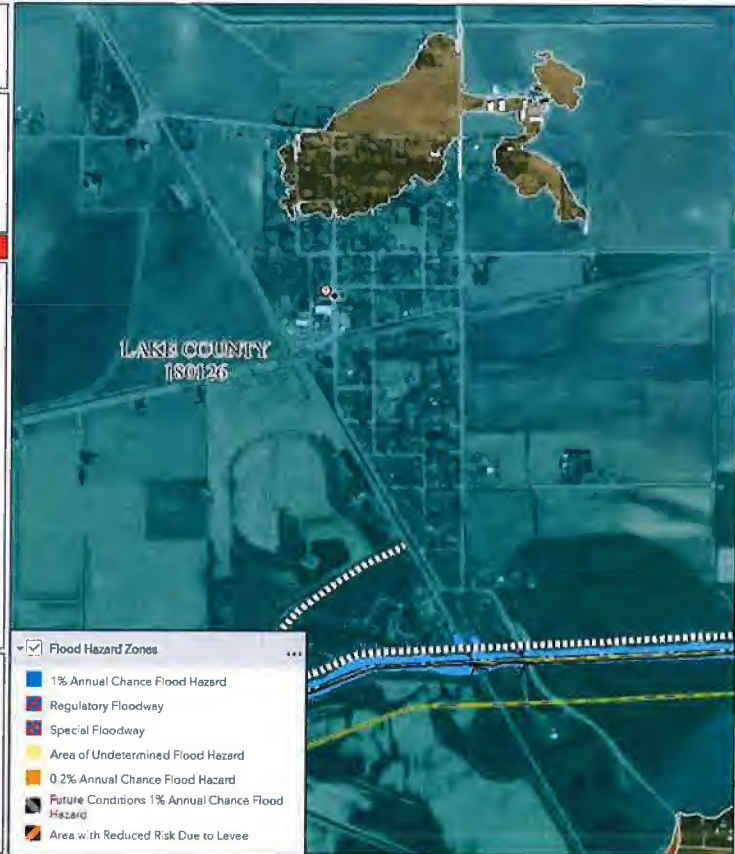
- 1% Annual Chance Flood Hazard
- Regulatory Floodway
- Special Floodway
- Area of Undetermined Flood Hazard
- 0.2% Annual Chance Flood Hazard
- Future Conditions 1% Annual Chance Flood Hazard
- Area with Reduced Risk Due to Levee



Lake County (Population 496,005)



- | | | | |
|--------------------------|-----|------|--|
| at Open-Source Reporting | NWS | 13 | Indiana Route 55 is flooded. Extensive flooding occurs to the Sumava Resorts area. Water approaches the top of levees. |
| | NWS | 12.5 | Water flows over part of US 41. |
| | NWS | 11.5 | Flood waters surround a number of homes located 1 mile east of Sumava Resorts. Some homes are affected just across the state line in Illinois. |
| | NWS | 10 | Flooding affects county and local roads. Wildwood Estates and Sumava Resorts begin to experience some flooding. |
| | NWS | 9 | Lowland agricultural flooding begins. |





FEMA

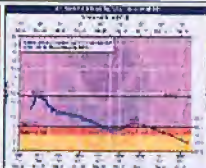
St. Joseph River at South Bend

St. Joseph County (Population 266,931)



Current
8.5
02 Mar

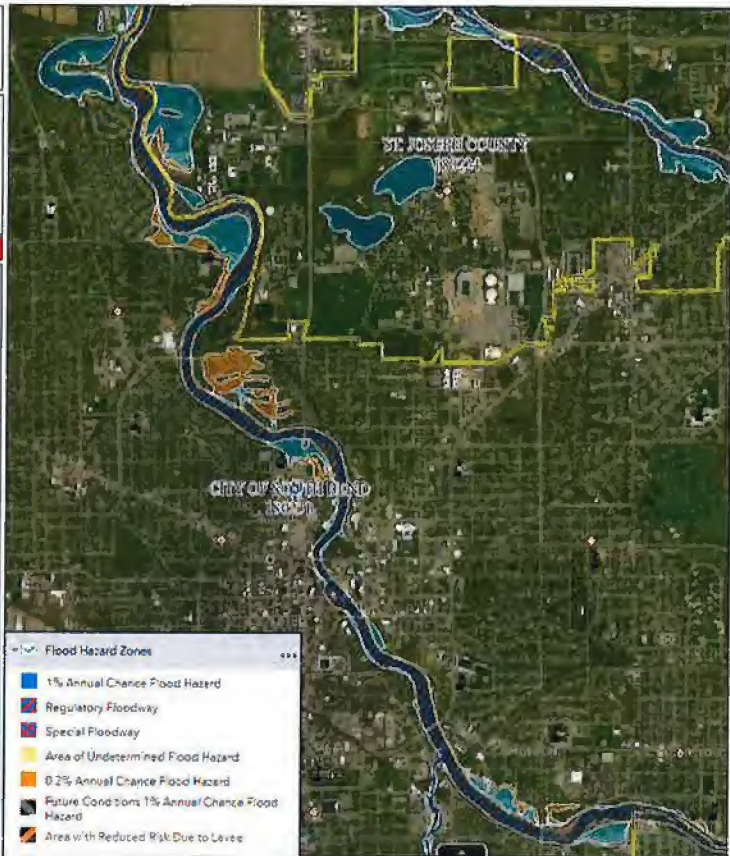
Forecast
9.4
03 Mar



Today	Tonight	Saturday	Sunday Night
Mostly Rainy	Mostly Clear	Partly Sunny	Clear
High: 45 °F	Low: 25 °F	High: 45 °F	Low: 30 °F
Flood Advisory Flash Flood Watch Flood Warning			

- Impacts Historical Critical Open-Source Reports**
- NWS 11.1** The river is at the 100 year flood level
 - NWS 11** Flooding exceeds the record flood of 10.9 feet. Business areas near Indiana University at South Bend campus are flooded. Residents in River Commons are flooding. Record flood will be in progress in western portions of Mishawaka and South Bend. Evacuations are necessary and the wastewater treatment plant will be completely flooded.
 - NWS 10** A near record flood is in progress. Flooding affects commercial areas near Indiana University at South Bend campus along Northside Blvd.
 - NWS 9** Moderate flooding is in progress. Flooding almost completely submerges parks and floods local streets near the St. Joseph River.
 - NWS 8** Flood waters begin to affect river parks and roads and may affect portions of Northside Blvd, Riverside and North Shore Drive. High water may cause flooding of basements and interfere with some commercial activities.
 - NWS 7** Flooding is confined to park land and park roads. Some backyard flooding may occur in residential areas near the river.
 - NWS 6** Flooding is confined to mostly park land and golf courses. Northshore Drive...Leeper Park and Petro golf courses begin to flood.
 - NWS 5.5** The river reaches flood stage with the lowest residential areas beginning to flood.

Operations Activity



FEMA

Kankakee River at Davis

Starke County (Population 23,197)

Current
12.8
02 Mar

Forecast
13
02 Mar

Today
Windy with Clouds
High: 48.1°F

Friday Night
Partly Cloudy
Low: 28.7°F

Saturday
Sunny
High: 42.1°F

Saturday Night
Mostly Cloudy
Low: 38.9°F

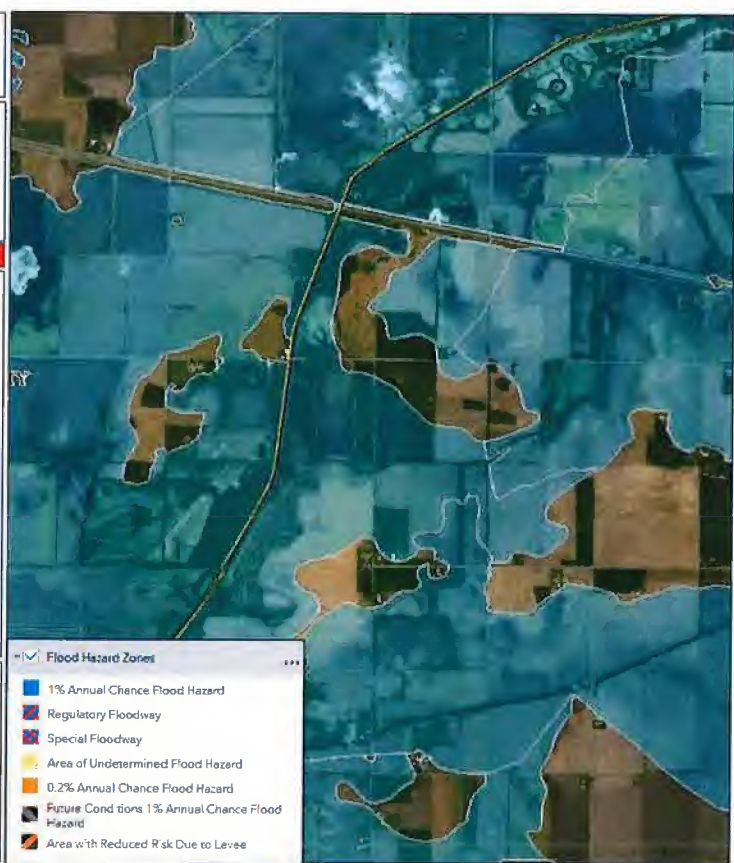
Flood Advisory Flash Flood Watch **Flood Warning**

Impacts:

- NWS 13** Extensive agricultural flooding is in progress.
- NWS 11** Flooding of secondary roads near the river begins.
- NWS 10** Flooding of low lying agricultural areas begins.

Operations Activity

Major Flooding
 Moderate Flooding
 Minor Flooding
 Active Stage
 State Activity
 Local Activity
 AFAC Activity
 NWS Forecast
 OHMS Report
 News Story
 Twitter Tweet
 Facebook Post



FEMA

Ohio River At Cairo

Alexander County (County Population 7,051)

Current
54.6
02 Mar

Forecast
55
03 Mar

Today
Clear
High: 54.6

Tonight
Clear
Low: 54.6

Saturday
Clear
High: 54.6

Saturday Night
Clear
Low: 54.6

Flood Advisory Flash Flood Watch Flood Warning

Impacts Historical Official Open-Source Reports

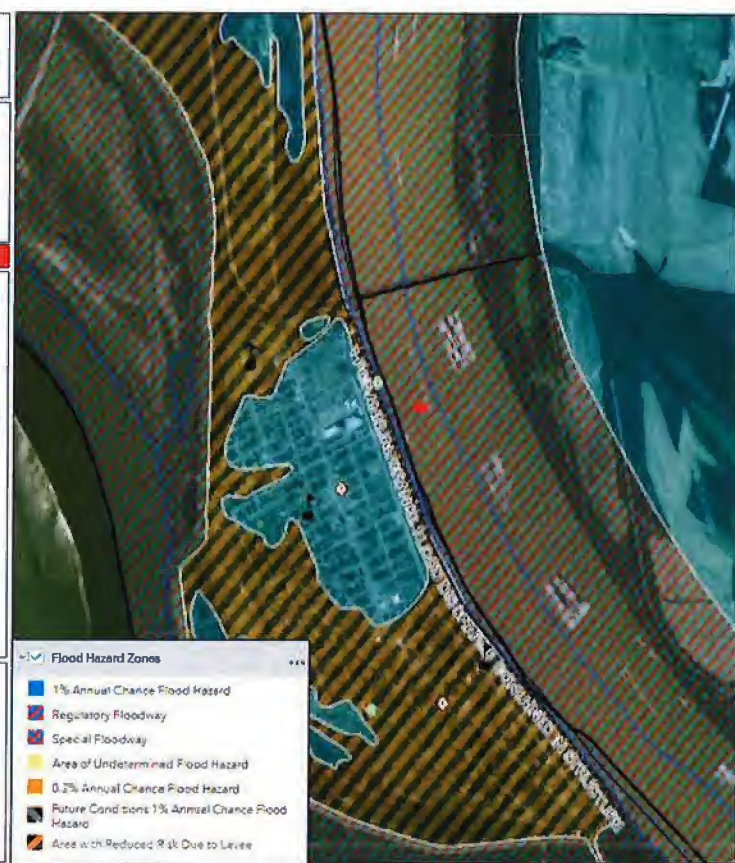
NWS	65	The river will reach the top of the protection at Mounds and Mound City.
NWS	64	The river will reach the top of the protection of Cairo.
NWS	61.72	This flood will exceed the highest stage on record.
NWS	56	U.S. Highway 51 near Wickliffe is closed.
NWS	50	The first gate is closed at Cairo
NWS	40	Minor flooding occurs affecting mainly agricultural bottomland and low lying areas.
NWS	32	Cairo begins pumping operations.

Operations Activity

****Floodwaters threaten to close U.S. 51 Ohio River 'Cairo' Bridge**

****Gallatin Co., IL flooding concerns**

Major Flooding Moderate Flooding Minor Flooding Action Stage State Activity Local Activity USACE Activity NWS Historical Official Report News Story Twitter Tweet Facebook Post



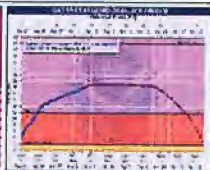


FEMA

Ohio River At Grand Chain Lock and Dam Pulaski County (County Population 5,792)



Current
54.4
02 Mar
Forecast
57.5
03 Mar



Today



High: 34°F

Flood Advisory

Tonight



Low: 25°F

Flash Flood Watch

Saturday



High: 55°F

Flash Flood Watch

Saturday Night



Low: 48°F

Flash Flood Watch

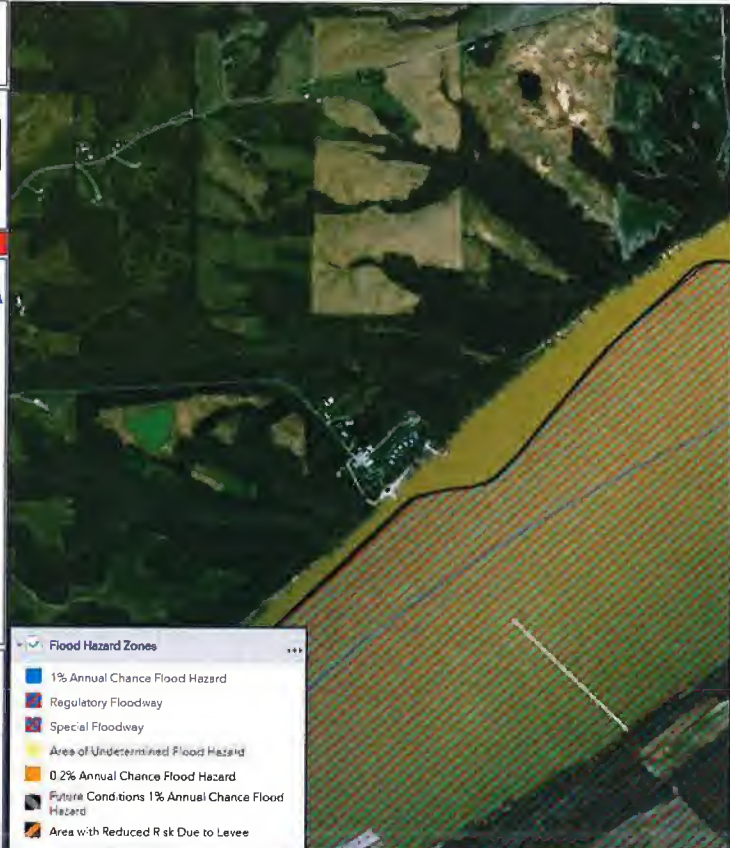
Impacts | Historical | Official | Open-Source Reports

NWS
NWS
NWS
NWS
NWS
NWS
NWS
NWS

- 64 This flood will exceed the highest stage on record.
- 48 Water reaches the power house at Lock and Dam 53.
- 42 This will cause minor flooding of mainly low lying areas

Operations | Activity

Major Flooding Moderate Flooding Minor Flooding Aesthetically Impaired State Emergency Local Emergency USACE Activity NWS Historical Official Request News Story Twitter Facebook Print





**FEMA's mission is to support our citizens
and first responders to ensure that as a
nation we work together to build, sustain
and improve our capability to prepare for,
protect against, respond to, recover from
and mitigate all hazards.**

Marlan, Andrew M.

From: CPIC
Sent: Thursday, March 01, 2018 12:01 PM
To: Katz, Walter;Forde, Janel;Tate-Nadeau, Alicia;Caluris, Steven M.;Panepinto, Leo
Subject: (U//FOUO) Horizon Report - 01 Mar 2018
Attachments: U_FOUO_Horizon_Report_01_Mar_2018.pdf

Good afternoon,

Please find today's Horizon Report attached. Thank you.

Chicago Police Department

Crime Prevention and Information Center (CPIC)
312-745-5669, Fax 312-745-6927

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It should be noted that some of this information describes First Amendment protected activities. The Chicago Police Department's Crime Prevention and Information Center (CPIC) recognizes that Americans have constitutionally protected rights to assemble, speak, and petition the government. The CPIC safeguards these rights and only reports on First Amendment protected activities for operational planning in the interest of assuring the safety and security of the demonstrators and the public. The CPIC will continue to communicate these events with other law enforcement partners in an effort to facilitate the Department's mission of assuring the safety and security of the demonstrators and the public.

Marlan, Andrew M.

From: U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) <ice.dhs@service.govdelivery.com>
Sent: Monday, April 23, 2018 2:16 PM
To: Welch, Emmet
Subject: ICE's Top 5 for the week of April 20

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U.S. Immigration and
Customs Enforcement

ICE'S TOP 5 NEWS STORIES



ICE arrests 225 during Operation Keep Safe in New York

Officers from ICE Enforcement and Removal Operations (ERO) arrested 225 individuals during a 6-day period in New York City, Long Island and the Hudson Valley.

[Learn More](#)

ICE Deputy Director statement on Sessions v. Dimaya

2

ICE Deputy Director statement on Sessions v. Dimaya

[Full Statement](#)

Liberian warlord 'Jungle Jabbah' receives historic sentence in immigration fraud case

3



A Liberian national was sentenced in federal court to 30 years in prison for immigration fraud and perjury. The prison term marks the longest sentence for a human rights violator case in the history of ICE Human Rights Violators and War Crimes Center, which supported the probe. The sentencing also caps an extensive investigation led by ICE Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) Philadelphia. [Full Story](#)

Defendant in deadly San Antonio tractor

trailer receives life in prison



The defendant charged with an illegal alien smuggling operation that resulted in 10 deaths was sentenced to life in prison. The sentencing was announced by Special Agent in Charge Shane Folden with ICE HSI in San Antonio, Attorney General, Jeff Sessions, U.S. Attorney, and John Bash, Western District of Texas. [Full Story](#)


ICE arrests 33 with history of human rights violation across the US during Operation No Safe Haven IV



ICE Enforcement and Removal Operations arrested 33 fugitives sought for their roles in known or suspected human rights violations during a nationwide operation. [Full Story](#)

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**U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement**



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Security**

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GOVDELIVERY 

Marlan, Andrew M.

From: Corbett, Thomas G.
Sent: Friday, March 02, 2018 11:11 AM
To: Wade, Landon J.
Subject: Horizon Report
Attachments: Homeland Security Products 02 MAR 18.pdf

P.O. Tom Corbett #4134
Chicago Police Department
Counter Terrorism Section
312-745-5290, Fax 312-745-6927

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It should be noted that some of this information describes First Amendment protected activities. The Chicago Police Department's Crime Prevention and Information Center (CPIC) recognizes that Americans have constitutionally protected rights to assemble, speak, and petition the government. The CPIC safeguards these rights and only reports on First Amendment protected activities for operational planning in the interest of assuring the safety and security of the demonstrators and the public. The CPIC will continue to communicate these events with other law enforcement partners in an effort to facilitate the Department's mission of assuring the safety and security of the demonstrators and the public.

Marlan, Andrew M.

From: Sardo, Michael J.
Sent: Monday, May 21, 2018 12:28 PM
To: Andrew Velasquez; Raimond.Ranne@cityofchicago.org
Subject: HLS notes 21 May 18
Attachments: Homeland Security Notes 21 May 18.pdf

P.O. Michael Sardo #19621

Chicago Police Department

Counterterrorism Section

Deployment Operations Center

Crime Prevention & Information Center (CPIC)

Bell (312) 745-5290/91 PAX 0249

Cell [REDACTED]

Fax (312) 745-6710

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Marlan, Andrew M.

From: U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) <ice.dhs@service.govdelivery.com>
Sent: Wednesday, May 30, 2018 4:15 AM
To: Vujevic, Norman L.
Subject: U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Daily Digest Bulletin



**U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement**

2 men charged with sex trafficking by force, 1 defendant remains at large

05/29/2018

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You are subscribed to Human Trafficking/Smuggling for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

2 men charged with sex trafficking by force, 1 defendant remains at large

05/21/2018 11:15 AM EDT

Kashamba John, 30, of Atlanta, and Tyler Robert Bachtel, 34, of Montclair, California, were charged by indictment with one count of sex trafficking by means of force, threats of force, fraud and coercion (Count One). John was additionally charged with one count of transporting an individual in interstate commerce with the intent that the individual engage in prostitution (Count Two). Bachtel...

 **SHARE**

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Headline News - Top 25 Update

05/29/2018

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You are subscribed to Headline News - Top 25 for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

ICE arrests 156 criminal aliens and immigration violators during Operation Keep Safe in Chicago area

05/25/2018 11:00 AM EDT

Of the 156 arrested, 74 had criminal convictions. One hundred forty-seven men and nine women were arrested; they range in age from 19 to 64 years old.

2 men charged with sex trafficking by force, 1 defendant remains at large

05/21/2018 11:15 AM EDT

Kashamba John, 30, of Atlanta, and Tyler Robert Bachtel, 34, of Montclair, California, were charged by indictment with one count of sex trafficking by means of force, threats of force, fraud and coercion (Count One). John was additionally charged with one count of transporting an individual in interstate commerce with the intent that the individual engage in prostitution (Count Two). Bachtel...

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**U.S. Immigration
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Enforcement**



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This email was sent to norman.vujevic@chicagopolice.org by: U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) · U.S. Department of Homeland Security · Washington, DC 20528 · 202-732-4242

GOVDELIVERY 

Marlan, Andrew M.

From: [REDACTED] (NBCUniversal) <[REDACTED]@nbcuni.com>
Sent: Saturday, May 26, 2018 10:53 AM
To: News Affairs
Subject: RE: NBC5 Info Request

Follow Up Flag: Flag for follow up
Flag Status: Completed

Okay, thank you.

From: News Affairs [mailto:nwsaffr@chicagopolice.org]
Sent: Saturday, May 26, 2018 10:48 AM
To: [REDACTED] (NBCUniversal) [REDACTED]@nbcuni.com>
Cc: [REDACTED] (NBCUniversal) [REDACTED]@nbcuni.com>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Re: NBC5 Info Request

Hi [REDACTED]

CPD had no involvement with the ICE raids. No further info.

PO Jose Jara #17406
Chicago Police Department
Office of Communications
(312) 745-6110
Fax (312) 745-6999

From: [REDACTED] (NBCUniversal) <[REDACTED]@nbcuni.com>
Sent: Saturday, May 26, 2018 10:32 AM
To: News Affairs
Cc: [REDACTED] (NBCUniversal)
Subject: NBC5 Info Request

Good morning,

This is [REDACTED] with channel 5. We got a release from ICE last night saying they arrested 156 illegal immigrants over the last several days in the Chicago area as part of their Operation Keep Safe. Was any of this done in conjunction with the Chicago Police Dept? Were any CPD arrests transferred over to ICE?

Info from ICE is below. Thanks!

[REDACTED]

ICE arrests 156 criminal aliens and immigration violators during Operation Keep Safe in Chicago area

Editor's Note: The arrest statistics provided in this news release represent preliminary data that has been manually reported to ICE headquarters. Official numbers can vary slightly from preliminary data.



CHICAGO — Federal officers with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Enforcement and Removal Operations (ERO) arrested 156 criminal aliens and immigration violators in the Chicago metropolitan area during a six-day enforcement action, which ended Thursday.

During this operation, ERO deportation officers made arrests in the following 37 communities: Addison, Arlington Heights, Aurora, Bartlett, Berkley, Berwyn, Blue Island, Bolingbrook, Bridgeview, Burbank, Carol Stream, Chicago, Chicago Ridge, Cicero, Des Plaines, Elgin, Hanover Park, Hoffman Estates, Geneva, Joliet, McHenry, Mt. Prospect,

Naperville, Northfield, North Riverside, Orland Park, Palatine, Park City, Rolling Meadows, Rosemont, St. Charles, Stickney, Stone Park, Warrenville, Waukegan, West Chicago and Wheaton.

Of the 156 arrested, 74 had criminal convictions. One hundred forty-seven men and nine women were arrested; they range in age from 19 to 64 years old.

Aliens arrested during this operation are from the following 11 countries: Mexico (125), Guatemala (10), Poland (6), El Salvador (4), Honduras (4), Philippines (2), Ecuador (1), Jamaica (1), Jordan (1), Lithuania (1) and New Zealand (1).

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Marlan, Andrew M.

From: [REDACTED] (NBCUniversal) <[REDACTED]@nbcuni.com>
Sent: Saturday, May 26, 2018 10:33 AM
To: News Affairs
Cc: [REDACTED] (NBCUniversal)
Subject: NBC5 Info Request

Categories: Jara

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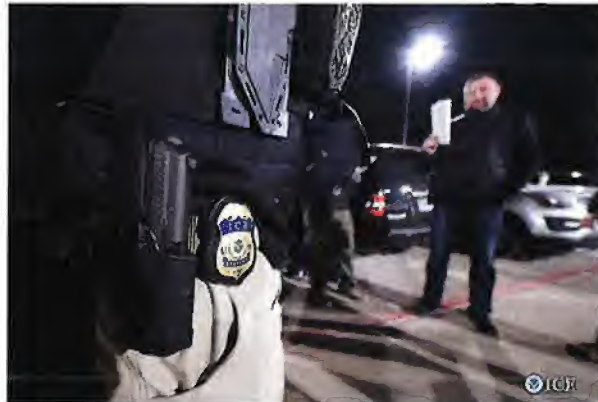
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454 North Columbus Dr. Chicago, IL 60611

Marlan, Andrew M.

From: News Affairs
Sent: Saturday, May 26, 2018 10:48 AM
To: [REDACTED] (NBCUniversal)
Cc: [REDACTED] (NBCUniversal)
Subject: Re: NBC5 Info Request

Categories: Jara

Hi [REDACTED]

CPD had no involvement with the ICE raids. No further info.

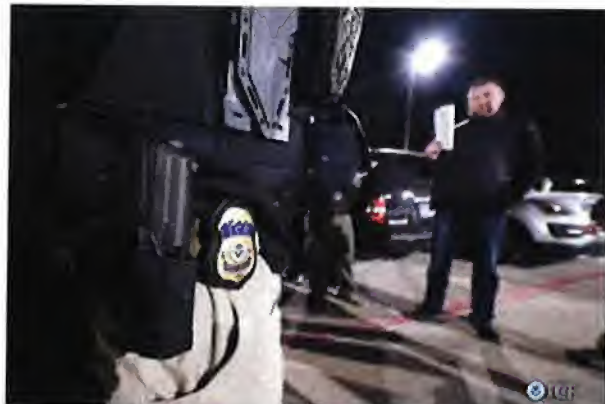
PO Jose Jara #17406
Chicago Police Department
Office of Communications
(312) 745-6110
Fax (312) 745-6999

From: [REDACTED] (NBCUniversal) [REDACTED]@nbcuni.com>
Sent: Saturday, May 26, 2018 10:32 AM
To: News Affairs
Cc: [REDACTED] (NBCUniversal)
Subject: NBC5 Info Request

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Marlan, Andrew M.

From: News Affairs
Sent: Saturday, May 26, 2018 10:41 AM
To: Guglielmi, Anthony;Giancamilli, Frank
Subject: Fw: NBC5 Info Request

Categories: Jara

Did CPD have anything to do with the immigration raids? See below. Please advise.

PO Jose Jara #17406
Chicago Police Department
Office of Communications
(312) 745-6110
Fax (312) 745-6999

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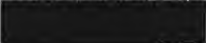
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60611

Marlan, Andrew M.

From: Stoyias, Thomas <thomas.stoyias@hq.dhs.gov>
Sent: Monday, May 21, 2018 5:20 AM
To: Stoyias, Thomas S.
Subject: Daily Clips
Attachments: DHSNewsBriefingClips20180521.pdf

Thomas Stoyias
Chicago Police Department
Law Enforcement Liaison Desk
National Operations Center DHS
Thomas.stoyias@hq.dhs.gov


Marlan, Andrew M.

From: Morin, Paul A.
Sent: Monday, March 05, 2018 10:19 AM
To: Stoyias, Thomas S.
Subject: FW: DHS Daily Operations Summary (5 March 2018)
Attachments: 0085-18 Flooding Central, U.S. Update Report 5 20180302_080220.pdf; 0086-18 Reverend Billy Graham Funeral Charlotte, NC Update Report 1 2018....pdf; 0103-18 Severe Weather Mid-Atlantic and Northeast, U.S. Update Report 6pdf; DHS Daily Operations Summary - 5 March 2018.pdf

From: Roberts, Edward [<mailto:Edward.Roberts@HQ.DHS.GOV>]
Sent: Monday, March 05, 2018 9:59 AM
Subject: DHS Daily Operations Summary (5 March 2018)

From: DHS OPS Reporting
Sent: Monday, March 05, 2018 12:08:08 PM
Subject: DHS Daily Operations Summary (5 March 2018)
Auto forwarded by a Rule

Today's DHS Daily Operations Summary is attached. This report is U//FOUO//LES and is posted to HSIN-R3 (Release-3) within the Law Enforcement (LE) portal.

DHS OPS Reporting
Office of Operations Coordination
Department of Homeland Security

Marlan, Andrew M.

From: U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) <ice.dhs@service.govdelivery.com>
Sent: Tuesday, May 29, 2018 11:17 AM
To: Maulawin, Tomas P.
Subject: ICE arrests 156 criminal aliens and immigration violators during Operation Keep Safe in Chicago area



**U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement**

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ICE arrests 156 criminal aliens and immigration violators during Operation Keep Safe in Chicago area

05/25/2018 11:00 AM EDT

Of the 156 arrested, 74 had criminal convictions. One hundred forty-seven men and nine women were arrested; they range in age from 19 to 64 years old.

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This email was sent to tomas.maulawin@chicagopolice.org by: U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) - U.S. Department of Homeland Security - Washington, DC 20528 - 202-732-4242



Marlan, Andrew M.

From: U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) <ice.dhs@service.govdelivery.com>
Sent: Tuesday, April 17, 2018 12:46 PM
To: Maulawin, Tomas P.
Subject: ICE arrests 225 during Operation Keep Safe in New York



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ICE arrests 225 during Operation Keep Safe in New York

04/17/2018 12:45 PM EDT

The arrestees include nationals from Albania, Antigua, Argentina, Bangladesh, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Burma, China, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Grenada, Guatemala, Guinea, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Jamaica, Jordan, Kosovo, Maldives, Mexico, Mongolia, Netherlands, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Pakistan, Poland, Portugal, Romania...

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